

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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## **MOUNT EDEN VINEYARDS ANOTHER SUPERSTAR FROM THE GOLDEN AGE**



I have long been a fan of Mount Eden Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains, whose wines have always had an excellent track record for long-term aging and very positive evolution in the bottle. The wines here continue to be made very much in the old school style that has made Mount Eden one of the most highly sought after wineries in all of California throughout its long history, but this is another of those superstars from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s that does not seem to get all the credit that they deserve these days, despite their unwavering commitment to outstanding, classic and cellar-worthy wines. But in spite of travelling a bit below the radar, the wines here at Mount Eden Vineyards remain utterly superb and should be on everyone's short list of must have estates from this outstanding region of California, as Mount Eden remains one of the greatest producers in the United States today. Mount Eden is equally adroit with all three grape varieties that it has produced since its earliest days, with the chardonnays, pinot noirs and cabernet sauvignons produced here amongst the very finest examples of their respective wines in America. The winery is one of the oldest and home to some of the most historic vineyards in all of California, as this isolated Santa Cruz mountain retreat, poised two thousand feet above sea level, was first opened in Saratoga in the 1940s by one of the state's seminal wine figures, Martin Ray, prior to its changing ownership and becoming christened as Mount Eden

Vineyards in 1972. Martin Ray first purchased the mountainside parcels and planted the vineyards that would become the backbone of Mount Eden all the way back in 1943, when his first chardonnay and pinot noir vines went into these mountainside slopes. Cabernet sauvignon vineyards would follow here a few years later.

Martin Ray was the son of a minister and started out his career as a young man in the 1920s as a stockbroker in San Francisco. He was originally from California and spent most of his formative years in and around Saratoga, which was then home to one of California's finest, pre-prohibition wineries, Paul Masson's La Cresta Vineyards. Paul Masson had come to California as a young man from the Burgundy region of France in the late 1800s, and after returning to his native land to finish his college education at La Sorbonne in Paris, he had returned to California to try and forge a career as a winemaker in the hills south of San Francisco. This was in the early 1890s and the vineyards of Burgundy were still in the midst of their struggle against phylloxera. He was befriended upon his return to California by Charles LeFranc, the owner of Almaden Vineyards, who hired Paul Masson to be his winemaker. Paul Masson would also marry Monsieur LeFranc's daughter a short time after his return, but tragedy struck not long after their marriage, when Monsieur LeFranc was killed in an accident involving a runaway horse. At a very young age, Paul Masson was forced into the position of the director of Almaden Vineyards. He continued on in this role for the remainder of the decade, but always dreamed of owning his own vineyards and winery. This would come to fruition when he purchased a ridge top in the Santa Cruz Mountains up above Saratoga in 1900, planting just over twenty-four hectares of vineyards to pinot noir and chardonnay, with the cuttings most likely hailing from the vineyards of Louis Latour back home in Paul's native Burgundy. The first wines produced from these vineyards were released in 1905, with Monsieur Masson specializing in high quality sparkling wines from the outset at his Paul Masson Champagne Company. His success arrived briskly and his fortune seemed secure, until Prohibition derailed the budding California wine business in 1921. Monsieur Masson kept his doors open producing a bit of Champagne for medicinal purposes (and only available with a prescription through a pharmacy in those twisted days), but, as was the case with so many other contemporary wineries in the budding west coast wine industry, prohibition was a devastating blow to his business from which he never fully recovered.

By the time Prohibition was lifted in 1933, Paul Masson was seventy years of age and ready to sell his eponymous Champagne company, as he had no sons whom to leave his winery to upon his retirement. One cannot overstate the changed nature of the wine business that prohibition brought about in its wake, with former bootleggers and organized crime members now heavily entrenched and quality wine far from a priority at most wineries. Martin Ray had been in and out of the cellars at La Cresta in his youth, falling in love with the winemaker's lifestyle as epitomized by Paul Masson up on his ridge above Saratoga, and he was already quite well-versed in fine wine by the time he left the area to get his college education and start out his life in the business world. Always at the back of his mind was to be able to earn enough to build a bucolic vineyard oasis such as Paul Masson had and craft high quality wines of his very own. He found success as a young man working as a stockbroker, and eventually founded his own firm in San Francisco. However, due to health considerations brought on by a mild stroke, he was looking to change careers and sought to purchase the Paul Masson Champagne Company from his old wine mentor as the company struggled to regain its momentum in the first post-prohibition years. Monsieur Masson tried to persuade a young Martin Ray to instead purchase

the unplanted ridge adjacent to his La Cresta property and plant his own vineyards, but Martin was persistent and eventually purchased Monsieur Masson's Champagne Company. One of his innovations during his tenure as owner of Paul Masson would be to release the first varietally-labeled bottles of pinot noir under the Paul Masson label. He would own the company for six years, receiving great acclaim for the superb quality of his pinot noir and chardonnay bottlings, as well as maintaining the excellence of the sparkling wine lineup already pioneered by Monsieur Masson. A tragic fire at the Paul Masson property eventually led Martin Ray to sell the Paul Masson brand, re-built winery and vineyards at La Cresta to the Seagram's distillery and using the proceeds from the sale to purchase that very same adjacent Santa Cruz Mountain ridge suggested by Monsieur Masson back in 1933 and planting his own vines here. Not surprisingly, he began planting in the spring of 1943 with chardonnay and pinot noir cuttings from the Masson La Cresta Vineyards, so the genetic source material for his vines also probably hails originally from Louis Latour and the hill of Corton. This site would become home to the Martin Ray Winery until 1970 and eventually, today's Mount Eden Vineyards.

By all reports, Martin Ray was a man of strong opinions and a vision for the potential of California wine that was far ahead of his time. His largess at the table was legendary, with most dinners or lunches for guests ending hours and hours later, with the table stacked with empty bottles and the air still pulsating with Ray's dissertations and diatribes about California's wine future. This was a tradition he had learned from Paul Masson, who had hosted fabled dinners at his "château" at the winery during his own heyday in the years before prohibition. Martin Ray was always known for pouring the very finest French wines alongside of his own, with comparative tastings aimed at showing just how good his wines could be. James Conway, in his book Napa, recounts one such typical twelve hour bacchanal at Ray's table in 1963 where Jack and Jamie Davies were inundated with Dom Perignon, great old claret and Burgundies, as well as Martin Ray's own wines over the course of a lunch turned into dinner, and which would fan the spark that led them to move up from Los Angeles and found Schramsberg Vineyards in Napa in 1964. According to contemporary accounts, Ray could be irresistibly charming or irascible, or both, over the course of an evening, but no one disputed that in the 1940s and 1950s, he was making the very finest wines in all of California. The Martin Ray wines were always single varietal, hand-crafted by Martin, who handled much of the viticulture and cellar work himself and they were considered quite expensive for their day. This was in an era when most California wine was still blended from different grapes and bottled under generic marketing names such as "Burgundy" or "Claret", or even worse, labeled by varietal names (in the wake of the commercial success Ray first achieved with varietal bottlings at Paul Masson in the late 1930s), despite having little or none of the higher-quality grapes in their blends. It was this dishonest approach to wine labeling (as well as the indifference to quality) on the part of many of Martin Ray's colleagues that earned his greatest ire, and many of the reports of his "difficult" nature that were garnered in the wine business at this time were really just a response to his tireless lobbying for higher quality and honestly-labeled wines in the 1940s and 1950s.

In the early 1950s, Martin Ray and his new bride Eleanor (Martin's first wife, Elsie, had been tragically struck down with cancer and passed away very soon after her diagnosis in 1951) built a home and winery up on the top of their property in Saratoga, two thousand feet above sea level on their rugged ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountains, and which continues to be the home of Mount Eden Vineyards to this day. It was at this time that Martin Ray also gradually expanded

his vineyard plantings, clearing some of his lower slopes on the property to put in his first acre of cabernet sauvignon, which came from cuttings taken from the fine winery of La Questa Vineyards in Woodside, about a half hour's drive north of Saratoga. These vines had originally been planted in the 1880s from cuttings brought to California from Château Margaux by Emmett Rixford, a wine-loving attorney from San Francisco. So, to the pedigree of pinot noir and chardonnay in Martin Ray's vineyards from Louis Latour's vineyards in the Côte de Beaune was added cabernet sauvignon that had originated at Château Margaux! Martin Ray had become familiar with the quality of the La Questa cabernets while drinking the vintages of the 1930s and 1940s, which at that time were considered amongst California's very finest examples of this varietal. He would produce a Martin Ray Winery bottling of cabernet sauvignon from fruit purchased from La Questa in his early years, while waiting for his newly-planted vineyards to come on line. Over the course of most of the next decade, from 1955 through 1962, Martin would slowly clear more of his ridge and plant further vineyards, while continuing to fashion some of California's finest wines from their isolated mountain location. One has to really understand just how far "off the grid" their property was at this time- up a two mile stretch of rugged, dirt road (the top half of which is still plenty rugged these days!) and where so much of the vineyard and cellar work still had to be done by hand. It was an arduous labor of love for Martin Ray! As the decade of the 1950s came to an end, the neighboring Montebello ridge to the north of the Ray property, mostly old, pre-prohibition and abandoned vineyard land, would be purchased by a small group of Stanford University professors, led by David Bennion, so that Martin and Eleanor Ray would soon have neighbors, one ridge over, at the newly-named Ridge Vineyards.

As the 1960s dawned, Martin Ray sought capital partners to further expand his vineyard plantings on his ridge, and this decision in the end would be his undoing as an independent producer. He had a vision of creating four more independent vineyards on the ridge, owned by friends and clients as investors in this new company, where he would manage production and craft each wine himself, creating a California version of the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. However, this new endeavor, called Mount Eden Vineyards, would eventually lead to his having to cede control of his own winery and vineyards to his investors by the end of the decade, after internal partner squabbles and litigation. As Jeffrey and Ellie Patterson, Mount Eden's current managing partners, write, "given Martin's autocratic style and emotional fragility," the bringing in of partners for the new endeavor "proved to be a fatal mistake for him and his family." The partnership managed to survive until the end of the decade of the 1960s, but in the autumn of 1971, the partnership collapsed in acrimony, with Martin Ray resigning from the Mount Eden board. The dissident partners ended up taking Ray to court, where he seemed poised to triumph, only to stop the case and make a personal guarantee to buy out his investors at Mount Eden and once again bring harmony back to his mountaintop winery. At the time, he had potential investors lined up from the east coast to finance his buyout of the Mount Eden group, but the deal did not go through and Martin Ray found himself just prior to the harvest of '72 without the cash to pay off the Mount Eden partners and a judge forced foreclosure on the adjacent Martin Ray property and winery, which was then handed over to his Mount Eden investors.

It was a sad ending to a career of one of California's seminal wine pioneers, who had championed high quality wines decades before most of his neighbors and who lost his vineyards and winery just as the golden age was about to dawn on California wine production. The new

partnership, without Martin Ray, renamed the entire estate Mount Eden Vineyards in 1972 and hired the well-respected Richard Graff, from Chalone Vineyards, to come in as a consultant and make the first few vintages of wines from the property. Like Martin Ray, the partners at Mount Eden continued to produce solely chardonnay, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon from their estate vineyards and to bottle the wines as one hundred percent varietals. Richard Graff produced the 1972 and 1973 vintages at Mount Eden as a consulting winemaker (with the assistance of his brother Peter), prior to the partners looking for a full-time winemaker to run the property. Due to the business infighting, the “lost vintage” of 1971 was not produced either under the Martin Ray or Mount Eden labels, with some of the estate’s chardonnay fruit sold off to Bob Travers at Mayacamas Vineyards and Richard Graff producing a small amount of cabernet from the estate’s vineyards for one of the investors in this vintage. However, while Mount Eden was producing wine on its own by the 1972 vintage, the infighting that had characterized the investment partnership in the late 1960s and eventually forced Martin Ray off of his mountaintop vineyard and winery, continued in the early years of Mount Eden as an independent winery and it would take quite some time before cooperation again reigned amongst the partners and Mount Eden Vineyards could function smoothly.

In 1974, the partners at Mount Eden turned to the young and then unknown Merry Edwards to become the estate’s full-time winemaker. Production had never been large in Martin Ray’s era on the property, as the combination of Ray doing much of the work himself and the rugged *terroir* naturally limiting yields, so that annual production was never more than a thousand cases of the three varietal bottlings combined. These numbers stayed much the same for most of the first decade of Mount Eden Vineyards official history after the name change in 1972. Merry Edwards stayed on as winemaker at Mount Eden for three vintages, leaving after crafting the 1976s, and the winery sought a permanent replacement through a handful of other long-term candidates over the course of the remainder of the decade, with Richard Graff still taking an active interest in the winemaking at the property as a consultant. In 1981, looking to fill the position of Assistant Winemaker, the property’s general manager hired Jeffrey Patterson, who had just graduated with second degrees in oenology and viticulture from the University of California at Davis, after having earned his initial degree in biology from UC Berkeley in 1975. The mid-1970s was a time of great ferment and excitement in the California world of wine and food and Jeffrey had been bitten by the “wine bug” soon after earning his first degree and worked in a series of restaurants in Berkeley just as Alice Waters was launching Chez Panisse and Steven Spurrier was organizing his famous tasting in Paris in 1976. Jeffrey had visited Mount Eden Vineyards back in 1978 and he knew full well the potential of this fine *terroir* and was delighted to take the Assistant Winemaker’s job here in 1981. His wife Ellie joined him at Mount Eden at this time and would occasionally assist with promotional events, (before joining the winery full-time a couple of years later) as the Chalone group was in charge of the management and marketing of the estate in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. Unbeknownst to the partners at Mount Eden, they had finally stumbled upon a permanent solution with Jeffrey’s hiring to the revolving chair of head winemaker here since Merry Edwards’ departure and the future of Mount Eden was now about to be placed in very good hands.

The winery had been struggling financially throughout the decade of the 1970s, despite the excellence of their wines, and by the start of 1983, the partners were ready for a wholesale change at the estate. Consequently, Jeffrey Patterson was promoted to head winemaker and

General Manager and his wife, Ellie Patterson (also a UC Berkeley grad with a degree in history) was brought in full-time as the Business Manager of the winery. The couple had been married three years earlier, sharing a love of fine wine and *haute cuisine* (their honeymoon in France had consisted of Michelin three-starred meals and visits to such iconic estates as Domaine Dujac, Domaine Leflaive and Champagne Krug) and they moved into the home built by Martin Ray at the top of the mountain as the on-premise proprietors of the estate and began the modern era at Mount Eden. They would become shareholders in the partnership in 1986 and eventually majority shareholders in 2008. There was a lot of work to do, as despite the partners having planted nearly five more hectares of cabernet sauvignon and just under three hectares of additional chardonnay vineyards on the property in 1980 (bringing up the vineyard patrimony at Mount Eden to just over sixteen hectares), when Jeffrey and Ellie took over the reins of the estate in '83, many of the very old vines originally planted by Martin Ray were in dire need of replanting. Viticulture had changed so profoundly in California between 1943, when Ray put in his first vineyard, to the mid-1980s, that the couple understood that eventually the old and feeble vines would all have to be replaced. To give some idea of just how frail the vines were getting by this time, the first pinot noir vines planted by Martin Ray in 1943 were now only producing around fifteen hectoliters per hectare by the early 1980s! To put this number in context, the maximum yields allowed for grand crus in the Côte d'Or is thirty-five hectoliters per hectare. The replanting was begun on a very gradual basis by Jeffrey in 1984, but he was also fully cognizant of the quality that the old vine fruit brought to the wines of Mount Eden and the replanting project of the oldest vines was to be stretched out over many years to retain some of the old vine character in the estate's wines for as long as possible, while still increasing production in the vineyards to yields that would make more economic sense for the winery. Eventually, the last of the old Martin Ray chardonnay vines were replanted after the '96 vintage, the pinot noir was replanted between 1996 and 1998 and the last of the Ray cabernet sauvignon was dug up in 2001.

Mount Eden's unique *terroir* is a combination of soil, exposure and elevation, not to mention proximity to both the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay. Being part of the Santa Cruz Mountain AVA requires that the vines be planted above the morning fog line in the spring and summer months, which ranges from six hundred to one thousand feet above sea level, depending on one's locations in the mountain range. Anything below the morning fog line is too cool and damp for high quality grape growing and is not entitled to the Santa Cruz Mountain AVA. This was California's first official viticultural designate, having been formed all the way back in 1981 and is the only one that is defined by altitude, as well as location. Martin Ray also had the good fortune all the way back in 1943 to lay out his vineyards with an easterly exposition, so that the vineyards soak up the more gentle morning sun and are a bit more sheltered in the heat of the afternoon. This is a key factor in allowing the fruit on the vines to ripen slowly over the course of the growing season, and this exposition of the vines has only become more important in an era of climate change. The soils here are Franciscan Shale, where the roots of the vines have to dig deep through the rock in search of nutrients and water. Martin Ray trained his vineyards in a rather unique style for California, with each vine standing alone and pruned with a few canes coming out from each trunk in a basket shape and secured at the top of its post (one sees somewhat similar pruning in Beaujolais in their *Goblet* method of pruning, but I have never seen anywhere quite the same pattern as used by Martin Ray), rather than training one longer cane per vine along a trellising system. At Mount Eden, Martin spaced his



vines out on a ten foot by ten foot grid, so as to safely be able to drive a tractor between them. Ray's unique planting pattern which would further complicate replanting of the vineyards over the ensuing years, as there was not the possibility simply to replace individual vines as they became feeble, but the whole vineyards would have to be replaced, with vine density increased and the vines laid out along trellises.



*Jeffrey Patterson on the left, Mount Eden's General Manager and Winemaker, at our March Vertical.*

All of the vineyards at Mount Eden continue to be cropped at low yields and dry farmed in the cooler mountain zones, with the slow ripening in these vineyards one of estate's great advantages over many of their colleagues in the more torrid sections of the California wine world. It is this cooler microclimate that helps produce the great longevity found in the wines of Mount Eden, whether they be chardonnay, pinot noir or cabernet sauvignon and indeed, these are amongst California's longest-lived wines (as the note on the stunning 1974 Chardonnay below will attest). Since the very earliest days here, the vineyards have been sectioned off with the chardonnay and pinot noir at the higher elevations around the winery and house, located at the top of the ridge, and the cabernet sauvignon planted further down the hillside, where the temperatures are a bit warmer. Martin Ray had planted a bit of cabernet in the 1950s up at the top of the ridge, which he used for experiments on different cuttings, but as Ellie and Jeffrey Patterson note, this "small Cabernet vineyard at the top never ripened fully and was replanted to Chardonnay in 1988," as "the weather and topography are better suited to the Bordeaux varieties at the lower elevations." As Martin Ray had started by planting his chardonnay and pinot noir earlier than his cabernet, there was a good deal of luck that much of his planting of cabernet sauvignon in the 1950s was done at lower elevations on the hillside, as much of the land at the top was already committed to the other two varieties, and this is what allowed him to make such good cabernet sauvignon in the late 1950s and 1960s when his own cabernet vineyards came on line.



In addition to wines from the estate's original vineyards, the Mount Eden has also offered for sale chardonnay, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon labeled under a variety of different labels from purchased fruit to augment what they have been able to produce from their own vineyards. Due to the small production from the old vineyards originally planted by Martin Ray, the winery needed to augment its production to meet customer demand and make the estate more economically viable as the older vines began to really produce tiny crops. This program began back in the mid-1970s in the era of Richard Graff's consultancy, when the winery first purchased additional chardonnay and zinfandel grapes to create a second bottling of chardonnay and a zinfandel here. The first wines produced from purchased fruit were a 1976 Zinfandel from Old Hill Vineyard and a 1976 Chardonnay produced from the Robert Young Vineyard in Sonoma County (which would become the flagship single vineyard wine from Château St. Jean in the years to come). These wines were initially labeled as "M.E.V." Chardonnay and Zinfandel, and wines produced from purchased fruit would wear this label up through the 1987 vintage, as a legal tussle with the Villa Mt. Eden winery in Napa Valley precluded the estate from using its own name on any wines produced from purchased fruit. Another of the tenets of the Villa Mt. Eden agreement was that after the 1976 vintage, Mount Eden Vineyards was required to purchase its fruit for second label bottlings solely in the Central Coast region, so these inaugural Sonoma bottlings in 1976 were the only wines ever produced at Mount Eden from Sonoma County vineyard sources. Subsequent to the '70s, Mount Eden began purchasing chardonnay fruit for the "M.E.V." label from the Ventana Vineyard in Monterey through the 1984 vintage and then switched to the MacGregor Vineyard in Edna Valley from 1985. Eventually, a second agreement would be found with Villa Mt. Eden to relax some of these strictures and allow the winery to sell this Edna Valley chardonnay under Mount Eden's own label beginning in the 1988 vintage and this bottling continues to be made to this day.

In 1999, Jeffrey and Ellie Patterson started another Mount Eden project of bottlings made from purchased grapes (or from specific lots of estate-grown fruit), which they dubbed their "Saratoga Cuvée" bottlings. The first Saratoga Cuvée was a cabernet sauvignon produced from purchased fruit in the Santa Cruz Mountain AVA in the 1999 vintage, and this would be joined by Saratoga Cuvée bottlings of chardonnay and pinot noir in the 2004 vintage. The Saratoga Cuvéés, whether they were made from purchased fruit or from lots taken from the younger vines in the replanted vineyards on the estate, were crafted with an eye towards producing wines that were a bit more "fruit-forward" and accessible than Mount Eden's own structured estate bottlings. A dramatic increase in vineyard production brought about by the replanting and modernizing of the trellising system and greater density planting provided much of the additional fruit that allowed for the creation of the Saratoga Cuvée line of bottlings. In 2007, Mount Eden also purchased the vineyard lands on another neighboring ridge, the former Cinnabar Vineyards, which had originally been planted in 1981 by a gentleman named Tom Mudd and who passed away in '07. From these new vineyard sources, the winery began producing a new line of wines labeled after the renamed property- Domaine Eden. The Domaine Eden label includes a chardonnay and pinot noir from the fruit grown in the former Cinnabar vineyards, and a cabernet sauvignon bottling that includes fruit from this vineyard, as well as some purchased grapes from other fine growers in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Beginning in the 2009 vintage, the Domaine Eden bottlings fully replaced the Saratoga Cuvée labels in the winery's lineup. Today, under its various labels, Mount Eden Vineyards produces approximately seventeen thousand cases of wine

each year, with about twenty-five percent of this being from their estate vineyards and produced under the Mount Eden Vineyards label.

I should note that one of the most impressive things for me about the wines of Mount Eden Vineyards is that they do extremely well with all three grape varieties that they have worked with since the first vintage of 1972, and their chardonnays, pinot noirs and cabernet sauvignons each should be recognized as amongst the very finest examples of their respective categories in California. Some of this must be credited to the superb *terroir* they have up on their Santa Cruz Mountain ridge, but it also speaks profoundly of how insightful the various winemaking decision-makers have been here over the years in allowing this fine *terroir* to remain center stage in a winemaking philosophy that has always valued balance and well-integrated structures for long-term aging over sappy fruit and heavy doses of new oak. The only real deviation from the original “house style” at Mount Eden is probably the three vintage stretch when Merry Edwards was in charge of the cellars here (1974 through 1976), as she certainly preferred a more extracted style of winemaking than the Graff brothers before her or any of the subsequent winemakers that made brief stays here until Jeffrey Patterson took over the head winemaking duties in 1983. However, despite the historical record of great, great success with all three major grape varieties at Mount Eden Vineyards, it is interesting that when I first became acquainted with the wines back in the early 1980s, it was the chardonnay bottling here that was the best known in the market and for many years, I mistakenly thought that Mount Eden was a “chardonnay specialist!” I asked Ellie Patterson if I was alone in this mistaken assumption that the winery excels primarily with one varietal and she commented that “our estate Chardonnay is still recognized as our flagship wine, although our Cabernet has gotten lots of attention in recent years.” She continued, “it somewhat depends on what the consumers have tried from us,” as “some people think all we make is Pinot Noir,” despite the fact that “Pinot is the smallest production and least known.” But, as I hope the notes below will convey, the superb quality of Mount Eden’s wines extends across the range of all three varietals and none should be emphasized at the expense of the other two!

Since Jeffrey Patterson’s arrival here in 1981 and his assumption of the mantle of head winemaker since 1983, the wines have settled into their present day mold of great, old school classic wines that would, no doubt, make Martin Ray proud if he was still with us (Martin passed away in 1976). Jeffrey’s non-interventionist winemaking style has been consistent since the ’83 vintage. However, if one were to ask Jeffrey, he would say that the decade of the 1980s was a period of experimentation for him and that he only really settled into his present winemaking style beginning in the 1990s, but my experience is that with sufficient bottle age, it is really hard to spot any point of departure between the wines from the two decades here. This is not to say that he has not continually fine-tuned aspects of his cellar regimen as the years have gone by and some things have gradually changed here over the years, but to my palate, I find the Mount Eden wines remarkable for their consistency of style, with the aforementioned brief period when Merry Edwards at the helm in the mid-’70s being the lone exception, as she liked to harvest her red grapes a bit later and really extracted a bit more aggressively than her predecessors or Jeffrey today. But, examples of Jeffrey’s fine-tuning of his approach would include the change from commercial yeasts to start fermentations to indigenous yeasts starting with the 2006 vintage. In this same vintage he also incorporated a two day “cold soak” for the estate pinot noir, and he is also using more whole clusters for the pinot when the vintage provides nicely ripe stems than

was the case when he first began. But, since day one, the wines have always been unfiltered and most often unfinned as well. One of the practices that has never been used at Mount Eden, and which is fairly common elsewhere in California, is acidulation, as the diurnal temperature swings in these high elevation vineyards have always maintained excellent natural acidity levels, which may be one of the reasons that the Mount Eden chardonnays are the longest-lived examples of the varietal in California, alongside those of Stony Hill Vineyards and Kalin Cellars.



The genesis for this article began during my visit out to the winery in the spring of 2011, at which time I told Ellie Patterson that I would like to write an historical feature on the estate in the near future. I returned from this trip and began to source some older bottles of Mount Eden's wines to augment what was in my cellar, with an eye towards getting enough tasting notes on older bottles to make the article properly thorough, but the years went by and I was not a whole lot closer to realizing the project, before Ellie reached out to me in the autumn of 2015. She mentioned that both she and Jeffrey were to be in New York in March of 2016 and wondered if I would like participate in a vertical tasting with their New York distributor, David Bowler, to help kick start my project? Needless to say, my answer was an emphatic "yes" and on March 14<sup>th</sup>, on my way to the airport to start my annual spring tasting trip in Europe, we sat down to eight vintages each of chardonnay, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon from Mount Eden Vineyards that the Pattersons had very kindly culled from their library of older vintages at the winery. Several months before this tasting, Ellie and I had compared notes on which vintages of which

bottling I had already assembled from my infrequent auction purchases of older Mount Eden wines in anticipation for this feature, so that we could select wines I did not already have a bottle of in my cellar and broaden the depth of the article's tasting notes. The tasting on March 14<sup>th</sup> was most unequivocally the finest send-off to the airport as I have ever experienced! Once I began work in earnest on this feature in mid-May, I pooled resources with my friend Mark Golodetz here in New York, and we combined my bottles with some of his old Mount Eden wines in the cellar to organize a second superb tasting of venerable wines from this great Santa Cruz Mountain estate and the article was ready to write.

### ***Domaine Eden and Saratoga Cuvée Chardonnay***

*As noted above, the goal of this line of wines is to produce wines that are a bit more forward than the long-lived and structured "estate" bottlings from Mount Eden's own vineyards. With the purchase of the old Cinnabar property in 2007, the Pattersons now have a very good source of additional fruit to join with some of their lots out of their own vineyards that seem to be a bit more forward in style, so that one can now look to the Domaine Eden portfolio of bottlings for wines from Jeffrey that will drink sooner and are really excellent bottlings for well-stocked restaurant wine lists. When the chardonnay in this tier was still called Saratoga Cuvée, it was all estate grown fruit that was declassified from Mount Eden's vineyards (in contrast to the pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon bottled under this label, which included some purchased fruit as well), from the younger plantings on the property. As Ellie Patterson notes, "in 2004 we split our chardonnay production in two to create the "Saratoga Cuvée". With the addition of more fruit from the former Cinnabar in 2007, it was possible to still make enough of this line and retain more of the estate-grown fruit for other bottlings, which led to the creation of a Mount Eden Chardonnay Reserve in this year and which is discussed more fully below. Despite the fact that the Domaine Eden bottling of chardonnay is made for early consumption, it still strikes me as a wine easily capable of at least a decade of positive evolution in bottle and is one of the best values to be found on the market today for serious, classically-styled chardonnay. Annually the Pattersons produced between two and three thousand cases a year of this bottling.*

### **2013 Domaine Eden Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2013 vintage of Domaine Eden Chardonnay comes in a tad riper than the 2012 version, but the wine is cut from the same old school stylistic cloth. The bouquet offers up a fine mélange of pear, fresh pineapple, a touch of acacia, a touch of hazelnut, a fine base of soil and an understated framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and well-balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, good faming acids, fine focus and grip and a more wide open, ample personality than the slightly more racy 2012 version. This is very tasty and classic in flavor profile, but generous already and not likely to last quite as long in the cellar as the previous vintage. Good juice. 2016-2022. **89.**

### **2012 Domaine Eden Chardonnay (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2012 Domaine Eden Chardonnay is really a beautifully made bottle of old school chardonnay, offering up a pure and complex nose of apple, pear, acacia blossom, lovely soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthful at age three, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, a fine chassis of acidity and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. At 13.5 percent alcohol, this wine is gently ripe and ample, but also nicely structured and will age very well indeed. A fine example. 2015-2025. **90.**

### **2007 Mount Eden Vineyards Chardonnay “Saratoga Cuvée”**

This bottling is destined to be renamed as the Domaine Eden cuvée beginning in 2009, but the wine will remain the same. This is produced from a selection of estate fruit, with younger vines generally going into this bottling and the older vines into the estate chardonnay. The 2007 vintage of the Saratoga Cuvée chardonnay weighs in at a very civilized 13.8 percent alcohol and is a lovely wine. The nose is deep, complex and quite pure, as it offers up scents of lemon, fresh pear, lovely, chalky soil tones, a touch of vanillin oak and a pungent topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and beautifully balanced, with lovely length and focus, fine mid-palate depth and a long, crisp and classy finish. This is really a fine value and harkens back to an age of California chardonnays that were built to age and caught one’s attention by their complexity and breed. Fine juice. 2011-2020+. **91.**

### ***Edna Valley Chardonnay Bottlings***

*The Edna Valley bottlings of chardonnay from purchased fruit began in 1985, when Jeffrey and Ellie Patterson purchased their first grapes from the MacGregor Vineyard. This vineyard has remained the source for this wine from the Pattersons, with the vineyard having been sold in 2002 to Jean-Pierre Wolff and renamed as “Wolff Vineyard”, but Mount Eden continuing to purchase grapes from the new owner and the wine has remained the same despite the name change. From 1985 through the 1987 vintages, the production from the MacGregor Vineyard was sold under the M.E.V. label, after which the new legal agreement with Villa Mt. Eden allowed it to be sold under the Mount Eden Vineyards label in 1988, with a slightly different design to distinguish it from the estate bottling (please see the photo below). The Wolff Vineyard is planted with the oldest chardonnay vines in Edna Valley, with the vineyard having been planted between 1973 and 1976. This wine is handled a bit differently than the Estate Chardonnay from Mount Eden, as it is raised in twenty percent new oak (as opposed to sixty percent for the estate) and spends eight months in barrel prior to bottling. In contrast, the Mount Eden Estate Chardonnay spends ten months in cask. Pricewise, this occupies a middle tier between the Domaine Eden bottling and the Estate Chardonnay and is the largest production bottling from Mount Eden, with between five and six thousand cases produced each year.*

### **2014 Mount Eden Vineyards “Edna Valley Old Vines” Chardonnay (Edna Valley)**

The label on this bottling has changed ever so slightly with the release of the 2014, as the Wolff Vineyard designation no longer appears on the front, so I have listed the wine to reflect this. However, the fruit source for this cuvée has not changed since the 1985 vintage and remains Wolff Vineyard. The 2014 bottling is an even fourteen percent octane and offers up a superb nose of pear, casaba melon, spring flowers, chalky soil, a touch of *crème patissière*, gentle vanillin oak and a signature touch of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively light on its feet, with a lovely core, excellent, nascent complexity, bright acids and outstanding length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is all too easy to drink out of the blocks, but the balance is here for the wine to also age quite gracefully. A very classy bottle and a superb value! 2016-2035. **92.**

### **2013 Mount Eden Vineyards “Wolff Vineyard Old Vines” Chardonnay (Edna Valley)**

The 2013 Mount Eden Vineyards “Wolff Vineyard Old Vines” bottling of chardonnay is absolutely beautiful, soaring from the glass in a complex and refined bouquet of pear, apple, a touch of beeswax, acacia blossoms, white soil tones and a discreet framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very young and primary, with a fine core, bright

acids and a tightly-knit, youthful personality that still needs a year or two in the cellar to really start to blossom. Aromatically, this wine is already very attractive, but it is a puppy on the palate and I would not touch a bottle until it has seen at least another year's worth of bottle age, as there are layers here just waiting to unfold. 2016-2030. **92.**

### ***Estate Chardonnay***

*Mount Eden's Estate Chardonnay bottling has been one of the flagship wines- perhaps the flagship- for the winery since the days of Martin Ray. It was the first Mount Eden wine that I became intimately familiar with in my early days in the wine trade and it remains one of my very favorite examples of west coast chardonnay. With the addition of chardonnay vineyard land on Mount Eden as part of the vineyard expansion here in 1980, there are now just over eight hectares of chardonnay planted on the property, which produce between 1500 and 2000 cases of this cuvée each year. In contrast, six to eight hundred cases of chardonnay used to be produced in the early 1980s, prior to the first fruit from the new vineyards being incorporated into this bottling in the 1985 vintage. All of the new vines that went in back in 1980 were planted with cuttings taken from the existing old Martin Ray vineyards, so the genetic material for Mount Eden's chardonnay continues to be tied to the original cuttings from Burgundy put in by Paul Masson at the turn of the last century and assumed to be from Louis Latour. The last vintage to incorporate any of the old vine, Martin Ray-planted fruit was the 1996 Estate Chardonnay, as at that point the old vines were so decrepit that they had to be replanted, and which Jeffrey undertook between 1996 and 1998. Again, only cutting taken from the existing chardonnay on the property were used for this final replanting, so the material continues to be linked back to the original Masson plantings. At the start of the new millennium, Jeffrey Patterson started to notice that the octane of the Estate Chardonnay was creeping up, due to climate change perhaps, and in the 2006 vintage he began to consciously pick a bit earlier to keep the potential alcohol levels down for his estate bottling of chardonnay (showing that even up in the two thousand foot elevations of Mount Eden's vineyards, the long reach of global warming cannot be totally avoided). As Jeffrey observes, "the goal at Mount Eden is to produce a twenty-five year wine with our chardonnay, and at higher alcohol levels, this is just not going to be the case." At our vertical tasting in March, Jeffrey noted that he was not overly happy with the pace of evolution of the chardonnays produced from 2000 through 2005, as he felt the slightly higher octane levels were allowing the wines to evolve at a bit brisker pace than what he feels is ideal for this wine, but that things are more to his liking with the structures of his estate chardonnay vintages post-2006. Prior to 2006, the chardonnay was routinely coming in between 13.5 and 14 percent in alcohol, which he feels will compromise the wine's longevity in bottle, but today they are consistently back down in the thirteen percent range. The Estate Chardonnay cuvée is raised in sixty percent new oak for ten months, prior to bottling, with the wine bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. It remains one of the longest-lived white wines produced in California and one of the reference point examples of chardonnay.*

### **2013 Mount Eden Vineyards "Estate" Chardonnay**

The 2013 vintage has produced an outstanding young example of Estate Chardonnay here at Mount Eden, and this looks likely to be one of the great long-distance runners in recent times for this ageworthy bottling. The wine is still young and quite tightly-knit on both the nose and palate, but with the depth and racy spine of acidity to age beautifully. The still quite primary bouquet offers up scents of pear, white peach, fresh almond, stony soil tones, vineyard flowers



and still a fair bit of buttery new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and focused, with an outstanding core of fruit, lovely soil signature, a fine structural spine and excellent bounce and grip on the long, nascently complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is still a puppy and is still in the midst of absorbing its new wood, but all of the constituent components are in place for the 2013 vintage to be one of the great classic Estate Chardonnay bottlings in the history of Mount Eden. The wine is already quite delicious, but it is still very early days for this wine and I would not even consider opening a bottle out of my cellar for at least another four or five years! 2020-2045+. **94.**

#### **2007 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 2007 Mount Eden Estate chardonnay is an absolute classic in the making. The deep, complex and beautifully youthful nose jumps from the glass in a complex blend of apples, pears, lemon oil, impressively complex soil tones, butter, acacia and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, bright acids, lovely intensity and a very long, youthful and seamless finish. I drank an awful lot of Mount Eden Estate chardonnay from the vintages of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it certainly seems like the 2007 is cut from the very same cloth as those classic wines. The alcohol here is 13.8 percent, which is entirely sensible and allows the freshness and purity of the wine to take center stage. A superb wine in the making. 2013-2030+. **94.**



### **2005 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 2005 “Estate” chardonnay from Jeffrey Patterson was showing very nicely at our March vertical, but the wine is completely *à point* at the present time and is probably not going to make it to its twenty-fifth birthday still in its prime, which of course is the goal for this wine. 2005 was a very short crop and a late harvest at Mount Eden (chardonnay brought in between September 17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>), with only a bit more than twelve hundred cases produced of this wine. The nose is quite lovely and impressively complex, wafting from the glass in a mature blend of pear, acacia blossoms, butter, almond paste, lemon oil, a nice base of stony soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a good core, fine bounce and grip and a long, focused and classy finish. This is a very good wine at its apogee, but it is not quite in the same league as the vintages of the 1990s or subsequent to 2006, when Jeffrey began harvesting a bit earlier to retain higher acidity in the finished wine. 2016-2023+. **91.**

### **2002 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 2002 vintage was more typical for chardonnay at Mount Eden, with the grapes brought in between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of September and the production of this bottling just over twenty-one hundred cases. Interestingly, the aromatic profile seems a tad riper than the 2005 that preceded it in our lineup, but at the same time, also less evolved. The bouquet is a superb blend of pear, peach, butter, vanilla custard, a lovely base of soil and just a hint of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with sound framing acids, very good balance and lovely length and grip on the complex, classy and focused finish. Another lovely wine at its peak. 2016-2025. **91.**

### **2000 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 2000 chardonnay bottling from Mount Eden is quite a ripe example of this varietal by the historical standards of the winery, but it also has a good base of acidity to keep the wine fresh and light on its feet. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fully mature blend of pineapple, butterscotch, orange peel, salty soil tones and a nice touch of buttered almonds in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with tertiary development, fine focus and grip and lovely lift on the long and wide open finish. At age sixteen this wine is at its apogee, but it retains plenty of life within and will continue to drink well for many years to come. 2016-2030. **92.**

### **1997 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 1997 Mount Eden “Estate” Chardonnay still included a bit of old vine fruit from the original, Martin Ray plantings. Jeffrey recalls that this was a very unusual year in that the budbreak was very early, followed by hot, summer conditions, but the overall growing season was fairly cool and the crop only had moderate ripeness by the time picking was done over the stretch from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. The nose is pure and complex, offering up a constellation of pear, fresh apricot, a touch of pineapple, lovely soil tones, almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and getting nicely tertiary in profile, with a bit of dried fruit overtones, a good core, bright acids and lovely focus and bounce on the long and mature finish. I like this wine very much. 2016-2025. **91+.**

### **1995 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 1995 Mount Eden “Estate” Chardonnay is fully mature at age twenty-one (no surprise there) and beautifully complex on both the nose and palate. The color is now a lovely golden hue, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a very refined aromatic blend of buttered pineapple, baked pears, toasted almonds, orange oil, a nice dollop of soil, hints of butterscotch

and just a trace of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and vibrant, with a lovely synthesis of mature flavors and still a nice framing of zesty acids, with fine focus and grip and a long, complex and classy finish. This is cruising along nicely and probably will not fade anytime soon, but it is fully mature and it is a really fine moment to be drinking this wine. 2016-2025. **93.**

#### **1993 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

I paired the 1993 Estate chardonnay up with the 2000 at one of our tastings, so that we could compare a wine from the period where the ripeness was a bit more than Jeffrey Patterson felt was optimal and a period seven years earlier, where this was not yet a climate change brought upon issue here. While both the 2000 and the 1993 showed beautifully, one could sense the greater cut and spine of acidity in the seven year-old wine. The bouquet of the '93 is fully mature, but still vibrant, offering up a fine constellation of pineapple, fresh apricot, a touch of new leather, lovely soil tones, sweet almonds and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with impeccable balance, zesty acids and impressive length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This is really good juice and with plenty of life still in it. It will not last as long as the 1992, but for the next decade or so, it will be its equivalent. 2016-2025+. **93.**

#### **1992 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 1992 Estate Chardonnay from Mount Eden is a superb wine that is at its absolute apogee of peak maturity at age twenty-four, soaring from the glass in a pure and vibrant blend of pineapple, pear, almond, a lovely base of soil tones, a touch of butterscotch and lovely, musky floral nuances in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a beautiful core of fruit, impeccable balance and a very long, pure and zesty finish. This is an absolutely classic vintage of Mount Eden chardonnay, from a vintage that Jeffrey characterizes as a “fairly normal harvest, with moderate ripeness and a high percentage of old Martin Ray vines.” There were 1,558 cases produced of estate chardonnay here in the '92 vintage. 2016-2035. **93.**

#### **1990 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

1990 was “a drought year, but with a beautiful, long growing season” Jeffrey Patterson recalls, with moderate yields and maturity coming late, so that the harvest was conducted between September 10<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup> in this vintage. The '90 Estate Chardonnay was drinking beautifully at our March vertical, offering up plenty of brightness and bounce to go along with a fully mature, complex aromatic mix of pear, pineapple, acacia blossoms, a touch of nutskin, citrus peel and an exotic topnote of mocha. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with fine framing acidity, good focus and grip and a long, complex and gently tertiary finish. This is quite a bit more along its evolutionary arc than the superb 1992 version, but it will continue to drink very well indeed for at least the next decade and probably more, as the wine remains fresh and beautifully balanced. 881 cases produced. 2016-2025+. **92.**

#### **1988 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 1988 vintage was another drought year, but with lower yields than in 1990, so that the harvest was quite a bit earlier and the grapes were quite concentrated from the lack of rain. The wine was showing beautifully at our March tasting- particularly for a chardonnay closing in on its thirtieth birthday- wafting from the glass in a mélange of backed pears, fresh apricot, orange peel, a lovely base of soil, almond and a gentle topnote of butterscotch. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really very well-balanced, with fine mid-palate intensity, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long, zesty finish. While this wine has probably

been at its apogee for at least the last fifteen years, it shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon! 2016-2030+. 92.

#### **1984 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

The 1984 Estate Chardonnay from Mount Eden was one of the legendary California white wines of my early days in the wine trade, and I had the good fortune to drink this wine with some frequency in the early and mid-1990s, but had not seen a bottle since that epoch until our March vertical. The wine at age thirty-two remains at its absolute summit of peak drinkability and soars from the glass in a vibrant and complex blend of pear, white peach, hazelnut, orange blossoms, acacia, a beautiful base of soil, beeswax and a touch of marzipan in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with great focus and purity, bright acids and great focus on the very long, vibrant and timeless finish. This has years and years of life still ahead of it. 1984 had a very long growing season according to Jeffrey, as the “budbreak was extremely early, yet the harvest was normal,” occurring between September 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. Only 797 cases were produced of the ’84 Estate Chardonnay, as Jeffrey used exclusively the old Martin Ray plantings. 2016-2030+. 95.

#### **1974 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Chardonnay**

This bottle is a stunning example of just how well Mount Eden chardonnays age, as at age thirty-nine, the wine is drinking beautifully and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. This particular bottle had a relatively low fill, as it had ullaged about four centimeters, but the color was bright and still green-gold and the wine is truly exceptional. The deep, mature and impressively vibrant bouquet offers up a lovely blend of fresh nectarine, baked pineapple, salty soil tones, orange zest, a touch of fresh rosemary and gentle notes of brown butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still crisp and beautifully structured, with a very good core of fruit, excellent focus and still lovely acidity keeping the wine tightly-knit on the long, mature and superbly-balanced finish. 1974 was quite a ripe vintage in its day, and the ’74 Mount Eden chardonnay came in at 13.5 percent alcohol- which I am sure was enormously ripe for this more civilized era, and over the course of several hours, the wine does show just a whisper of backend heat which keeps its score down just a touch. But, all in all, this is a remarkable bottle of wine that will continue to drink well for at least another decade and probably longer! 2013-2023+? 92.

#### ***Chardonnay Reserve***

*As mentioned above, the Chardonnay Reserve was first produced in the 2007 vintage, after the purchase of the old Cinnabar vineyards, which not only expanded the available fruit for what would become the Domaine Eden bottling, but also gave some additional vat space for the establishment of a Reserve bottling of chardonnay. Today, when Jeffrey and Ellie Patterson decide to produce a Reserve bottling, they hold back eleven casks of Estate Chardonnay for additional aging and which is then destined to become the Reserve. The sole difference in elevage between the Estate and the Reserve bottlings of chardonnay from Mount Eden Vineyards is that the Reserve spends an additional year of aging in tank on its fine lees prior to bottling, after having been racked into stainless steel from cask after ten months of barrel aging. Both cuvées are raised in the same percentage of new oak, sixty percent, and are essentially produced from the same blocks of vineyards and comparable age of vines, but the Reserve is aged fully a year longer in tank before it is bottled and always seems to show more depth and structure from this additional elevage. Since its inaugural vintage of 2007, the Reserve Chardonnay has not been produced in 2011 or 2014, due to short crops, but has been produced*

*in each vintage besides these two. Only two hundred and sixty cases are made of the Reserve Chardonnay in the vintages that it is produced.*

### **2012 Mount Eden Vineyards Chardonnay “Reserve”**

The 2012 Reserve Chardonnay from Jeffrey Patterson is a beautiful, young bottle in the making. The nose is still quite primary, but shows outstanding depth and potential in its blend of apple, pear, acacia blossom, lovely soil tones, a touch of hazelnut and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is very pure, focused and primary in personality, with its full-bodied format still quite tightly-knit, with a fine core, lovely acids and impressive focus and grip on the long, youthfully complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is still very early days for this lovely wine, and it will require some patience of those who would like to drink it with its secondary layers of complexity in full bloom. A lovely bottle that should be a real long distance runner. 2020-2045+. **94.**

### **2010 Mount Eden Vineyards Chardonnay “Reserve”**

The 2010 Mount Eden Reserve Chardonnay is a tad riper than the 2012 version (14.2 percent versus 13.5 percent), and is starting to show some lovely secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate in comparison to its younger sibling. The bouquet is deep, complex and classic Mount Eden in its aromatic constellation of buttered pears, fresh pineapple, almond, a fine base of soil, acacia blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with blossoming complexity, good soil signature, bright acids and fine length and grip. Despite the wine being only two years older than the 2012 version, it seems more like seven or eight years further along its evolutionary arc and is already drinking very nicely at age six, but it seems unlikely to make “old bones” by the high standards of this iconic estate. 2016-2025+. **91.**

### **2007 Mount Eden Vineyards Chardonnay “Reserve”**

The 2007 Chardonnay Reserve was the very first one produced by Mount Eden Vineyards when I last tasted it a few years ago, it was really showing fine potential. The wine is really a marvelous bottle in the making, as it offers up a deep and nicely reserved mélange of citrus zest, pear, spring flowers, lemon oil, complex minerality and a lovely framing of gently buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and notably more soil-driven than the 2007 Estate bottling (which is also outstanding in its own right), with snappy acids, fine focus and a very long, complex and refined finish. This is superb, old school California chardonnay that will age long and gracefully. 2015-2040. **95.**

### ***Domaine Eden Pinot Noir***

*When Mount Eden purchased the vineyard land and winemaking facilities of the former Cinnabar Vineyards, there were already nearly five hectares planted on this neighboring mountain ridge to pinot noir and chardonnay, with only a very small parcel of cabernet sauvignon on the property. Consequently, the Domaine Eden bottlings of pinot noir and chardonnay are comprised primarily of fruit from this property, with the addition of some young vine fruit from Mount Eden’s own vineyards as well. There were another five-plus hectares of unplanted land on the property and starting in 2010, the Pattersons have planted all of this to pinot noir, so that the next generation will have more pinot noir fruit to use for this bottling from Domaine Eden, but this is still several years off into the future. The exposition of the vineyards at Domaine Eden is north-facing, rather than the east-facing vineyards on the Mount Eden ridge. Today there is eleven hundred to two thousand cases per year produced of Domaine Eden Pinot*

*Noir, but this will obviously expand in the future. As is the case with the domaine bottling of pinot from Mount Eden's vineyards, Jeffrey Patterson is now including a fair bit of whole clusters in his Domaine Eden Pinot Noir, if the stems are ripe, so that in the 2013 vintage, thirty percent whole clusters was used for this bottling.*

### **2013 Domaine Eden Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

In the cooler 2013 vintage, the Domaine Eden Pinot Noir is a full point lower in octane than the riper 2012. The wine is beautifully light cherry in color and offers up a fine aromatic constellation of cherries, a touch of beetroot, gentle spice tones, a lovely base of soil, delicate notes of cocoa powder and roses and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and intensely flavored, with a nice touch of sappiness at the core, a properly primary personality, just a bit of ripe tannin and lovely focus and grip on the tangy and long finish. This is really lovely juice, and though it is made to be approachable out of the blocks, I would really be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for at least a couple of years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. A great bargain! 2018-2035+. **91+**.

### **2012 Domaine Eden Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2012 Domaine Eden pinot noir is pretty rip by the high and traditional standards of Mount Eden Vineyards, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but the wine is still quite vibrant on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a gently musky blend of baked cherries and strawberries, lovely spice tones, a touch of cocoa powder, stony soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a sappy core of fruit, good soil drive, modest tannins and a long, complex finish that shows just a whisper of backend heat at the close. I would have loved to have seen it a bit lower in octane, but it is very well-made and easy to drink. 2015-2025. **88**.

### **2009 Domaine Eden Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The fruit for this new bottling all hails from the former Cinnabar vineyards that Mount Eden has recently purchased one ridge over from their original vineyards. This is a classy bottle of pinot that shows a bit of whole cluster fermentation in its pretty and complex nose of cherries, woodsmoke, a nice touch of cinnamon, fresh herb tones and a stylish base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and juicy on the attack, with good mid-palate depth, soft tannins and lovely length and grip. A fine value and a very civilized 13.5 percent in alcohol. 2011-2020. **90**.

### ***Estate Pinot Noir***

*The Mount Eden Estate bottling of pinot noir is the longest running red bottling from the estate, dating back to Martin Ray's very first vintages in the 1940s. These days, when one comes across the rare old bottle of Martin Ray from his earliest days, it is usually the pinot noir bottling that one finds at auction, as in this era, he was probably better known for his pinot noirs than he was for his cabernet sauvignon bottlings. As the old vines here were amongst the first planted at Mount Eden, they were producing at very low crop levels in their later years and these were amongst the first of the fragile old vines that Jeffrey Patterson had to start replanting in the mid-1980s. Jeffrey replaced these old vines bit by bit over the years, guarding a small percentage of the remaining old vines to include in the pinot noir bottlings all through the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, and finally, with the 1997 vintage, he produced a limited number of bottles of a special "Vieilles Vignes" bottling, made exclusively from the last of the old vines. He finally replanted the last of the very old, Martin Ray pinot noir vines in 1998. Due to how virused*



*these Martin Ray-planted pinot noir vines were by the time of replanting, this is the only variety that had to be replanted with other plant material than cuttings from the original vines. While there have been reserve bottlings of both chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon from time to time at Mount Eden, there was never a reserve bottling of pinot noir produced here. One of the nice things about being up at elevation in the Santa Cruz Mountains is that the cool evening temperatures keep up the acidity levels nicely, so that long life is never a problem with this bottling. Since the vineyard expansion undertaken in 1980 did not include any new pinot noir, there are just under three hectares of pinot noir vines planted at Mount Eden and this remains the smallest production of the estate bottlings, with production typically ranging from seven hundred to nine hundred cases a year. In short crops, this has been dramatically less in some years, so for example, in 2005, there were only 126 cases produced! The only additional pinot noir planting on the property was the changeover of one small parcel of cabernet sauvignon, that Martin Ray had put in at the crest of the ridge way back in the 1950s, to pinot noir, but this was not done until 2010 and those vines are not yet sufficiently old enough for the fruit to be going into the estate bottling. Production has been increased from the decade of the 1970s for this cuvée solely by the change from Martin Ray's old ten foot by ten foot vine density to planting of these vineyards on standard trellising systems and denser plantations, once the old, diseased Martin Ray vines were taken out.*



*A good look down at the morning fog line (that defines the Santa Cruz AVA) from Mount Eden's vineyards.*

*Jeffrey has evolved his pinot noir philosophy slightly as the years have gone by, using cultured yeasts for fermentations for much of the first couple of decades of his time as the head winemaker here, but he has rethought this in the last decade and since the 2005 vintage, he has used solely indigenous yeasts for the fermentation of the Estate Pinot Noir. Beginning in the 2006 vintage, he also began to use a two day “cold soak” pre-fermentation maceration for the pinot. Additionally, he has begun bottling this wine a bit earlier starting with the 2000 vintage, so that now the estate pinot is bottled in September following the vintage, rather than allowing the wine to spend a second winter in cask for spring bottling, which was standard operating procedure for the estate pinot noir previously. For many years, the goal has been to use fifty percent new oak for the estate pinot noir bottling, but this has been up and down a bit depending on yields in a given vintage, with a few vintages (such as 2005) having to be raised entirely in new wood, due to the extremely short crop load in that vintage. This is the smallest of the “estate” bottlings from Mount Eden, as the first vineyard expansion that occurred here in 1980 was only for chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon, with no further plantations of pinot noir going in at that time. Production has been up and down over the years due to the vagaries of yield when the old vines were relied on more in the cuvée, but the goal these days is to produce just under a thousand cases per year of this bottling, if Jeffrey Patterson can obtain his target yields of between thirty and forty hectoliters per hectare for his pinot noir.*

### **2013 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2013 vintage of the “Estate” pinot noir bottling from Mount Eden is outstanding. The wine is the same octane as the fine 2012 version, but both the nose and palate seem more seamless and refined, indicating just absolutely perfect ripeness in 2013. The perfumed bouquet offers up a youthful blend of cherries, strawberries, cocoa powder, a fine base of soil tones, just a touch of nutskin, fresh thyme, incipient cinnamon and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with an outstanding core of fruit, stellar transparency, ripe, suave tannins, tangy acids and exceptional length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a very young and very, very fine bottle of pinot noir in the making. It will be approachable in a few years, but I would try very hard not to touch a bottle until it has had a full decade to evolve in the cellar! 2023-2065+. **94.**

### **2012 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

The 2012 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” pinot noir is a full point lower in octane than the Domaine Eden bottling, and 13.5 percent alcohol is clearly a sweet spot for this vineyard. The bouquet is pure, focused and complex, jumping from the glass in superb blend of red and black cherries, a touch of grilled meat, black minerality, incipient notes of cola, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise and soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the beautifully balanced and still quite primary finish. This will be an excellent bottle with sufficient bottle age. 2020-2045+. **92+.**

### **2008 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The 2008 Mount Eden Estate pinot noir is a very classy bottle that offers up a fine combination of ripe, pure and fairly forward fruit tones and a fine base of soil. This is a very classic 13.5 percent in alcohol and thus avoids any signs of jamminess or inelegance. The bouquet is a classy mélange of red and black cherries, plums, cinnamon, a touch of chocolate, fresh herbs, soil and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and beautifully balanced, with a lovely, juicy core of fruit, a fine signature of soil and impressive length and grip on the modestly tannic finish. This will drink well right from the outset, but should have no

problems aging at least twenty-five to thirty years on its impeccable balance. Fine juice. 2011-2035+. **93.**

#### **2007 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The 2007 Estate pinot is just a tad riper than the classic 2008, as the wine tips the scales at 13.8 percent alcohol, but shows absolutely no signs of heat or overripeness. In fact, this is an absolute classic in the making, as the wine soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, herb tones, smoke, a touch of cinnamon (again from the inclusion of some whole clusters), complex soil tones and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite reserved in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, moderate tannins, fine acids and impressive focus and grip on the long and tangy finish. A superb bottle of Santa Cruz Mountain pinot noir. 2015-2040+. **94+.**

#### **2005 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The flowering in 2005 was abysmal for the pinot at Mount Eden and Jeffrey Patterson ended up with only six barrels (a normal crop load would produced forty!) in this very short vintage. Budbreak was late and a freak storm right in the midst of the flowering reduced yields by eighty-five percent! The wine however is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a blossoming mix of black cherries, beetroot, a nice touch of dill, dark soil tones, cedar and a bit of allspice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and beautifully transparent, with fine acids, modest tannins and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is eminently drinkable today, but another four or five years will really allow all the secondary elements to blossom fully. This was the last vintage to be completely destemmed of estate pinot here. 2016-2940. **93+.**

#### **2000 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The 2000 vintage of estate pinot is absolutely into its apogee today, but has decades of life still ahead of it. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mature constellation of cherries, beetroot, *sous bois*, allspice, a touch of mustard seed, lovely smoky tones and a deft framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely tertiary today, with a fine core, still a bit of tannin and a long, tangy and soil-driven finish. As Jeffrey Patterson notes, “moderate ripeness and a classically-balanced style” have produced “a testament to moderation.” 2016-2035. **93.**

#### **1995 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The 1995 growing season was “very cool” according to Jeffrey and two-thirds of the estate bottling was comprised of fruit from the remaining Martin Ray vines. The picking began in late September, with the pinot brought in on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of this month and only 386 cases were produced. The wine was showing very well in March, offering up a quite black fruity nose that befits its cooler vintage profile, with scents of dark berries, cassis, charred wood, grilled meat, a bit of tariness and a lovely base of forest floor. There is also just a touch of brett on the nose, but this is very minimal. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tertiary in personality, with very good depth (though not quite the core of the 2000), melted tannins and very good length and grip on the poised and well-balanced finish. This is a lovely, black fruity bottle at its apogee, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2016-2030+. **90.**

#### **1990 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The 1990 Estate Pinot Noir was still made exclusively from the old vine Martin Ray plantations, as the first of the replanted pinot noir was still too young to be included in the estate bottling. Consequently, there were only 259 cases produced in this vintage. Jeffrey Patterson calls the 1990 pinot year a “great, moderately cool vintage, with great balance and weight” in the

resulting wine. This was very much in evidence, as the wine jumps from the glass in a deep, complex and tertiary aromatic constellation of black cherries, woodsmoke, gamebird, *sous bois*, cigar ash, coffee and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of pure fruit, excellent transparency, melted tannins and fine grip and focus on the very long and classy finish. A truly superb vintage of Mount Eden pinot noir! 2016-2035+. **93.**

#### **1987 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

The yields were a bit more generous in 1987 than in 1990, but as this was still made entirely from the old Martin Ray vines, only 338 cases were produced in this fine vintage, which was fairly cool up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Jeffrey Patterson retained thirty percent of the stems in this vintage for the pinot noir. The wine is utterly classic on both the nose and palate, offering up a superb bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, forest floor, woodsmoke, menthol, lovely soil tones and just a whisper of fresh dill in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with outstanding mid-palate depth, lovely soil signature, faded tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and vibrant finish. A beautiful bottle. 2016-2035. **94.**

#### **1985 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

1985 is Jeffrey’s favorite vintage of his tenure for pinot noir at Mount Eden, as he notes that “it was a small crop, but a perfect growing season” and the resulting wines had “great acid and pH numbers and moderate sugars.” The wine was made from one hundred percent whole clusters and was raised entirely in new casks, as the crop was so short as to only produce 198 cases of Estate Pinot Noir in 1985. The wine is stunning on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine mélange of black cherries, dark berries, woodsmoke, gentle notes of cinnamon, dark soil tones, cigar ash and a nice, autumnal topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant in personality, with a great core, melted tannins, bright acids and excellent grip on the long, complex and vibrant finish. This is probably the finest vintage of Mount Eden pinot that I have had the pleasure to taste! 2016-2035. **95.**

#### **1980 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

1980 was one of the smallest crops ever for the Estate Pinot Noir at Mount Eden, as only 166 cases were produced, all from the old Martin Ray vines. The cool growing season produced a late harvest, with picking of pinot noir occurring from September 27<sup>th</sup> until October 4<sup>th</sup>. Though this predates Jeffrey Patterson’s arrival at Mount Eden, he notes that cellar records indicate that this vintage was also all whole clusters. The wine at age thirty-six is lovely on the nose, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, charred wood, oak leaves and hung game. On the palate the wine is fullish, a touch four-square in personality, but with a good core and impressive length and grip on the fully mature finish. This is starting to look over the far side of the plateau and is probably best drunk up in the next several years. Good juice, but not in the same league as the top vintages of Estate Pinot Noir from this era. 2016-2023. **88.**

#### **1973 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Pinot Noir**

This was only the second vintage produced at the newly christened Mount Eden Vineyards, with the wine made by Richard and Peter Graff. It was a very fine growing season and the Graff brothers made this entirely from whole clusters and were able to produce 404 cases from the old vines. The wine at age forty-three is still at its apogee and offers up a beautiful, tertiary constellation of dark berries, *sous bois*, roasted *pigeon*, a complex base of soil, cigar ash and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex

and absolutely *à point*, with fine structure and vitality, lovely balance and a very long, complex and classy finish. Beautiful and nearly timeless wine. 2016-2035. **93.**

**1963 Martin Ray Winery “California” Pinot Noir (Santa Cruz Mountains)**

*This bottle was tasted several years ago out in Sonoma at a dinner with Rod Berglund of Joseph Swan Vineyards. I include the note again here, as it is the most recent note I have on one of Martin Ray’s own wines.* The 1963 Martin Ray pinot is decidedly more vibrant on both the nose and palate than the more fragile ’63 BV Pinot Noir served alongside of it, but this lovely wine also faded a bit over the couple of hours that it was open, indicating that it too is probably best drunk up over the relatively near-term. The gorgeous nose is very Clos de la Roche-like in its aromatic mélange of cherries, beetroot, cinnamon, *sous bois*, game, woodsmoke and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch coarse texturally, but with lovely mid-palate depth, fine focus and complexity and a very long, bright and vibrant finish. In terms of aromatics and flavors, this could clearly be a wine from the Côte de Nuits, but texturally it is not quite in the same category. But a lovely wine and a great pleasure to drink. 2009-2020. **89.**

**Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon**

*The Domaine Eden cabernet bottling is the only one of the three varietals under this label that continues to include some purchased fruit in the blend, as there was only a very small parcel of cabernet planted on the old Cinnabar property when Mount Eden purchased it in 2007. Following on the heels of the Saratoga Cuvée cabernet, the Domaine Eden bottling continues to be produced from some purchased grapes from other top growers in the Santa Cruz Mountains, with Jeffrey Patterson setting the standards for yields and quality of the fruit that will go into this bottling. It is not one of the most high profile bottlings from the winery, but in my experience, the wine is impeccably made and always one of the very best cabernet values to be found in all of California. Today, production ranges from two to three thousand cases a year of the Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon and it is a wine that I strongly urge readers to search out, as in the vintages that I have had the pleasure to taste it, its classic style and superb quality are really a revelation for its price-tag!*

**2012 Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 2012 vintage of Domaine Eden cabernet sauvignon is a touch riper than the ’07, but still an even fourteen percent octane and utterly classical in aromatic and flavor profile. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a sophisticated blend of black cherries, a touch of mint, lovely soil tones, Cuban cigars, gentle spice tones and a very refined base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, modest, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex and classy finish. This is quite approachable out of the blocks, but is also nicely balanced to age very gracefully and should provide quite a long window of peak drinkability. 2016-2035+. **91.**

**2007 Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon**

Are you looking for an absolutely classic, old school cabernet at a great price? Look no further! The 2007 Domaine Eden cabernet is a cool, 13.5 percent alcohol and a really classy glass of wine. The superb nose offers up a complex blend of cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, beautiful soil tones and a deft touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and classy, with very refined tannins, excellent mid-palate depth and superb complexity

and grip on the long finish. This is cabernet the way it was meant to be in California! Great value. 2011-2035. **91.**

### ***Estate Cabernet Sauvignon***

*Interestingly, the Mount Eden Vineyards bottling of cabernet sauvignon has included a small percentage of cabernet franc and merlot for more than two decades, but the original vineyards planted by Martin Ray in the 1950s from cuttings taken from La Questa Vineyard were one hundred percent cabernet sauvignon. Jeffrey Patterson was the first to incorporate merlot and cabernet franc into the vineyard matrix here at Mount Eden, taking cuttings from Nathan Fay's superb vineyard on Stag's Leap to plant these two varieties in 1981. Martin Ray's very earliest vintages of cabernet sauvignon, which were renowned in the immediate post-war years in California, were originally produced from purchased fruit from La Questa Vineyard and it was not until the late 1950s that he started to produce cabernet sauvignon bottlings from his newly-planted vineyards at Mount Eden, which of course hailed from cuttings from the same vineyard and (as mentioned above) originally were sourced from Château Margaux. It has always been my impression that Mount Eden Vineyards has been better known for its chardonnay and pinot noir bottlings, but this may just be a reflection of the markets I worked in prior to becoming a full-time journalist. There is no doubt that Martin Ray's cabernets were as renowned as his chardonnays and pinot noirs in his era, and the varying winemakers at Mount Eden over the years have certainly excelled with cabernet since the inaugural vintage of 1972.*

*When the new vineyards were put in back in 1980, the cabernet sauvignon acreage was increased at Mount Eden, so that today the estate has a bit under five and a half hectares of cabernet sauvignon planted (including other Bordeaux varieties), which is enough to produce twelve hundred to two thousand cases a year of the Estate Cabernet Sauvignon bottling. As was the case with the chardonnay planted in 1980, the plant material for the new cabernet vineyards were taken exclusively from cuttings of the original vines put in by Martin Ray and hailing originally from La Questa Vineyard, and this use of selection massale from the original genetic material has been maintained as the last of the old Martin Ray-planted cabernet was replanted in 2001, so that continuity in Mount Eden's cabernet vineyards has been maintained. Over the years, this has probably been the bottling that has fluctuated a bit in terms of style at Mount Eden, as certainly the Merry Edwards vinified vintages of cabernet sauvignon from 1974, 1975 and 1976 were more extracted and overtly powerful in style than those produced under the Graff brothers or by Ms. Edwards' successors in the years that followed. However, interestingly, the Merry Edwards made wines from those three vintages have converged more and more as the years have gone by with the cabernet bottlings produced before and after her era, which I take as a sign that eventually the underlying terroir at Mount Eden comes to the fore. The other stylistic change for this bottling can be seen in the incorporation of merlot, cabernet franc and eventually petit verdot in the wine, starting in the 1987 vintage, which tended to produce a bit more velvety interpretations of the bottling through the 2000 vintage. This was also the era when Jeffrey Patterson began the production of an old vine bottling of cabernet from the last of the Martin Ray plantations (1990 through 2000), so that the old vine intensity at the core of the estate bottling was not present and the wines were a bit less powerfully built as a result. However, as the note on the outstanding 1995 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon will attest, the difference in this era is one of style, not quality!*



*Mount Eden's cabernets were made from one hundred percent of this varietal up through the 1986 vintage, following the precedent set by Martin Ray in earlier decades. The plantings made of merlot and cabernet franc that were first put in by Jeffrey Patterson in 1981 during his first year at the winery began to find their way into the cabernet sauvignon in the 1987 vintage, with first merlot being added to the blend (ranging anywhere from four percent all the way up to one quarter of the cépages, depending on the vintage). Beginning with the 1993 vintage, the cabernet franc also began to be included. From the 1993 vintage up through 2006, the blend was standardized to reflect the percentages of each grape planted in the Bordeaux variety vineyards on the property, with seventy-five percent of the blend being cabernet sauvignon, twenty-two percent merlot and three percent cabernet franc. Keeping in mind that from the 1990 vintage through the 2000, Jeffrey Patterson also produced an "Old Vine Reserve" of cabernet sauvignon from the remaining Martin Ray-planted vines on the property, so that there was probably a bit more cabernet sauvignon actually planted on the property than the seventy-five percent going into the blended Estate bottling, as this percentage did not include the last of the old Martin Ray parcels. Subsequent vintages from 2006 forwards have also included a bit of petit verdot that has been planted on the property and the percentages of the cépages of this cuvée now move around a bit, depending on how Jeffrey feels the vintage works best as a blend and which grape varieties excel in any given vintage.*

*This cuvée used to be raised in one hundred percent new oak, dating all the way back to the first vintages of the 1970s, and this continued during Jeffrey's first several vintages at the helm here in the 1980s. Starting in the 1990 vintage, the percentage of new oak used for the Estate Cabernet was decreased to twenty-five percent, as this was the first year that the fruit from the vineyard planted in 1980 was used for the Estate bottling, and this percentage was utilized for this cuvée throughout the decade. Today, Jeffrey now uses between fifty and seventy-five percent new oak for the Estate Cabernet, depending on the vintage. The cabernets here are routinely bottled unfiltered, but are fined with egg whites in many vintages, if this is deemed beneficial to the wine. As noted above, 1990 was the vintage where the Estate Cabernet began to include the 1980-planted vineyard fruit regularly and the last of the Martin Ray cabernet vines began to be bottled on their own, as Old Vine Reserve. During the stretch from 1987 to 1989, the fruit from the younger vineyard was bottled on its own with the name of "Lathewisen Ridge", but I have never seen a bottle of this wine. While Mount Eden Vineyards is not usually at the top of connoisseurs' lists when asked to name their favorite examples of classic cabernet, it has always been one of my top handful of producers of long-lived, old school cabernets that blossom and gain in complexity with extended bottle age and this continues very clearly to be one of the very best cabernets produced in California. Interestingly, only Ridge and Mount Eden produce cabernets produced exclusively on the coastal mountain range. As good as many of the earliest vintages of cabernet have been here, I would have to suggest that Jeffrey Patterson is currently making the most impressive examples from this variety in the history of Mount Eden and today, his cabernets really should be ranked at the very top of their class, alongside folks like Mayacamas, Heitz, Corison, Ridge and Philip Togni.*

## **2012 Mount Eden Vineyards "Estate" Cabernet Sauvignon**

The very soon to be released Mount Eden cabernet sauvignon is an absolutely classic in the making. It is a tad less ripe than the lovely 2011 version, coming in at an even thirteen percent octane and offering up a very pure and nascently complex bouquet of black cherries, a

touch of eucalyptus, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, lavender and a nice, judicious framing of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and outstanding length on the very refined, youthful and impeccably balanced finish. This is an old school bottle of cabernet in the very best sense of the term, with great potential that is simply waiting for the passing of time to blossom and shine. But, it is properly structured out of the blocks and will need time in the cellar to start to really drink with generosity. It should prove to be very long-lived, once it reaches its plateau of maturity. 2025-2075+. **95.**

**2011 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 2011 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon is a beautiful and utterly classic bottle in the making, with a cool vintage signature on both the nose and palate that is very, very exciting for long-term cellaring. For the record, the wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol, so it is far from underripe, and offers up a superb, primary bouquet of cassis, dark berries, cigar wrapper, great minerality, a touch of violet, bitter chocolate, a whisper of dried eucalyptus and a deft framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and gorgeously soil-driven, with a fine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins, outstanding focus and grip, seamless balance and a very, very long and nascently complex finish. This is a legend in the making, but like all truly great young California cabernets, this is going to need plenty of bottle age to really blossom and show all of its multi-faceted layers of complexity. 2025-2075+. **95+.**

**2007 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 2007 Mount Eden Estate cabernet was one of the finest examples of this varietal that I tasted on my recent trip to California and it too, is an absolute classic in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and stunning, as it offers up a complex mix of cassis, dark berries, a touch of youthful chipotle pepper, wonderful soil tones and a very stylish framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly reserved in style, with a sappy core of pure fruit, ripe tannins and a beautifully complex, poised and very long finish. I would tuck this superb wine away in the cellar for the balance of the next decade and then drink it with great pleasure over the ensuing forty years. 2020-2060+. **95.**

**2006 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 2006 Mount Eden Estate cabernet is a tad riper than the stunning 2007, as it weighs in a 13.9 percent alcohol, but this too is an absolutely old school bottle of wine. The nose is deep, complex and quite classic in its aromatic profile of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, a great base of soil, fresh herb tones and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, a fair bit of ripe tannin, tangy acids and great length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2040+. **94.**

**1995 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1995 Mount Eden Estate Cabernet was produced from the standard blend for the era between 1993 and 2006, with seventy-five percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-two percent merlot and three percent cabernet franc (there was also an Old Vine Reserve made in this vintage). At age twenty-one this wine is starting to drink so beautifully that it is a must buy for lovers of classic cabernet if one is lucky enough to come across a bottle, as the wine soars from the glass in a perfumed bouquet of sappy black cherries, cigar ash, eucalyptus, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, a hint of violet and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and light on its feet, with a lovely core, suave, melting tannins and a very long, seamless and refined finish. This wine is just entering its plateau of maturity and

will continue to drink with great style for at least another quarter century, but it is hardly a crime to be opening bottles today, as this wine is drinking gorgeously! 2018-2050. **94+**.

**1990 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1990 vintage of Estate Cabernet was the first to incorporate the vines planted in 1980 into this cuvée, as well as the first to see an Old Vine Reserve produced from the remaining Martin Ray plots of vines. As Jeffrey Patterson recalls, 1990 “was a great season with a long, slow finish” with the “harvest occurring on October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> under perfect conditions.” The wine spent two years in cask prior to bottling without fining or filtration and finished at 12.4 percent octane. This wine was served alongside of its vintage sibling of Old Vine Reserve at our March tasting and the Estate is not quite as plush at the core as the old vine example, but is more fully mature and is drinking beautifully today. The wine offers up an excellent nose of cassis, dried eucalyptus, a touch of road tar, a beautiful base of soil, cedar and a touch of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still nicely structured, with moderate, well-integrated tannins and superb length and grip on the complex finish. A beautiful bottle of cabernet that is just entering its prime of life at age twenty-six and has decades ahead of it. 2016-2040. **92.**

**1988 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1988 vintage of Mount Eden’s Estate Cabernet predated the inclusion of fruit from the plantations of 1980, so this is all old vine Martin Ray fruit. As noted above, 1988 was a drought vintage, but Jeffrey noted that “the vines, being so old, did not suffer greatly and the maturity was full.” He included four percent merlot in the blend in ’88, and the wine was fined with egg whites, though unfiltered, prior to bottling. It ended up at 12.2 percent alcohol, but completely ripe and is very svelte today, as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday. I have had a few really lovely 1988 cabernets in recent years and the Mount Eden version is probably the very best example of the vintage I have tasted, as the wine soars from the glass in a blend of dark berries, a touch of dried eucalyptus, curry, cigar smoke, beautifully complex soil nuances, lead pencil and a topnote of exotic spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really shows a lovely sappiness at the core that is very rare in ’88, with great focus and grip, modest tannins and outstanding balance on the very long and complex finish. A transcendental 1988 cabernet! 2016-2035. **94.**

**1987 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1987 Mount Eden cabernet is a fine, fine example of this lovely vintage, with better structured and soil signature than many of the highly-touted wines from this year. The last time I tasted this wine was seven or eight years ago and it was still not quite ready for primetime drinking, but the ensuing time in the cellar has allowed it to now reach its apogee and the wine is wide open and superb. The blend in ’87 was eighty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon and twelve percent merlot and the wine came in at a cool 12.6 percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, pure and impressively complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of cassis, dark berries, a touch of chipotle pepper, cigar ash, stony soil tones and a nice touch of tobacco leaf in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and very transparent, with a fine core of sweet black fruit, still just a bit of suave tannin and outstanding complexity and balance on the long and velvety finish. This is one of the cabernet stars of the 1987 vintage, which in general have not aged quite as well as was initially expected, with many of the so-called top wines not standing the test of time. This is emphatically not the case for the 1987 Mount Eden cabernet! 2016-2040. **94.**

### **1983 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

This was Jeffrey Patterson’s first vintage as head winemaker and it was a very challenging year to begin with, as rainfall in ’83 was double the norm and the harvest was very late, with the cabernet brought in from October 21<sup>st</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>. The wine was comprised entirely of cabernet sauvignon in this vintage and attained 12.6 percent alcohol. At age thirty-three, the wine is drinking really quite well, as it offers up a moderately ripe nose of cassis, bell pepper, cigar ash, dark soil tones, tobacco leaf and a bit of fresh herb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a bit of backend tannin still remaining, solid depth at the core and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. Like most of the 1983 cabernets, I assume this wine was quite green out of the blocks, but time has worked its magic and it is really quite a fine drink today, if never likely to challenge the top cabernet vintages from Mount Eden. 2016-2035. **91.**

### **1982 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1982 Mount Eden cabernet was the last vintage prior to Jeffrey Patterson assuming the sole responsibilities here for winemaking. This is a low octane vintage for this cuvée, coming in at only twelve percent octane and clearly has a “cooler vintage” personality. That said, though not everyone around the table at our tasting was enamored of this style, I really liked the wine and found it really fine foil with the duck breasts paired with it at the dinner. The bouquet offers up a complex, black fruity constellation of dark berries, cassis, cigar wrapper, dried eucalyptus, almost tarry soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, still a bit of chewy tannins on the backend and a long, low fat and classy finish. This is slightly sinewy in personality, but also intensely flavored and impeccably balanced. Good juice. 2016-2040. **91.**

### **1980 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1980 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon from Mount Eden is a fine bottle, with again a very black fruity personality, but it is a bit riper than the ’82 paired up with it and now quite wide open and ready for primetime drinking. The bouquet offers up a blend of dark berries, road tar, cigar ash, scorched earth, dried eucalyptus and just a touch of roasted game in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with fine balance, quite moderate tannins, a very respectable core and nice bounce from good acidity on the long and *à point* finish. This is quite different in personality from the middleweight 1982, but comparable in quality. 2016-2035. **91.**

### **1979 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1979 Mount Eden Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the finest examples of this vintage I have had the pleasure to taste in many years. The deep, complex and beautifully proportioned bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, heather, fresh sage, a touch of chocolate, stony soil tones and tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a rock solid core, superb complexity and balance, still a bit of tannin to resolve and outstanding length and grip on the focused and very classy finish. A great bottle of 1979 Cabernet, the Mount Eden is just starting to enter its plateau of peak maturity and should prove to still have several decades of superb drinking ahead of it. 2012-2035+. **94.**

### **1975 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1975 vintage was Merry Edwards’ second at the helm at Mount Eden and this is a very different interpretation from what the Graff brothers produced prior to her arrival and what Jeffrey Patterson et. al. crafted after her departure. Merry Edwards liked to pick later than her

peers at Mount Eden and pushed for extraction, so the '75 cabernet spent fully days macerating on its skins during fermentation and the wine is one of the biggest and broadest-shouldered examples of Mount Eden cabernet that I have ever tasted. This should not be confused with the best, as it is decidedly not in the top tier of vintages from this estate, and 1975 was a year of enormous potential. At our March vertical the wine was showing well, if not charmingly so, as it offers up a deep and dense nose of cassis, saddle leather, dried eucalyptus, cigar ash, dark soil and fresh herb tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with still a bit of tannin and very good length and grip on the powerful finish. This has plenty of life still ahead of it and shows off some of the typically fine *terroir* of this bottling, but it is certainly a more extracted example and not as interesting to my palate as wines like the '73, '78 or the top vintages of the 1980s. 2016-2040. **90.**

**1974 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon (magnum)**

The 1974 cabernet from Merry Edwards' first vintage at the helm at Mount Eden is drinking beautifully out of magnum today, and though it is a bit more powerful in personality than the 1973, it is still a superb example of the vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and now wide open, offering up scents of cassis, pomegranate, a touch of mint, cigar ash, chipotle peppers, dark soil tones, a touch of spice (vaguely reminiscent of nutmeg) and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, fine focus and grip, tangy acids and a long, complex, still gently tannic finish. This is a beautiful wine with decades and decades of life still ahead of it (particularly in magnum). 2016-2050+. **94.**

**1973 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1973 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon was the second vintage crafted by the Richard and Peter Graff here at Mount Eden, and the wine is really very lovely and still right in its prime fully forty-three years out from the vintage. This was a small crop that was picked between October 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> and the wine was fined, but not filtered prior to bottling. The wine is showing beautifully today, offering up a deep and tertiary bouquet of cassis, cigar ash, complex, dark soil tones, menthol, woodsmoke and a touch of red curry in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its absolute apogee, with a good core, a wide open and inviting personality, lovely focus and balance and a long, velvety and very pure finish. Just a lovely vintage of Mount Eden cabernet in its prime. 2016-2025+. **93.**

**1973 Mount Eden Vineyards “Estate” Cabernet Sauvignon “Second Bottling” (magnum)**

1973 was the only vintage that Mount Eden made two bottling runs for their cabernet sauvignon, with the two runs six months apart. The first bottling was done in August of 1975 and the second bottling run in February of 1976. The two wines were identical other than the extra six months spent in cask for the second bottling. This magnum was tasted a few years ago and offers up a fine, deep and complex bouquet of black cherries, dark berries, pipe tobacco, herb tones, a stony base of soil, fresh herbs and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch moderate in its mid-palate concentration, but with excellent detail, still a bit of chewy tannin, and outstanding length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. I did not drink this magnum and the above “first bottling” side by side, so I do not know if it is just my imagination, but the first bottling seemed to have just a touch more mid-palate stuffing from its shorter stay in cask prior to the *mise*. There is certainly no rush to drink this wine up anytime soon- particularly in magnum. 2009-2020+. **92.**



### **Cabernet Sauvignon “Old Vine Reserve”**

As I alluded to above, Jeffrey Patterson produced a special bottling of the remaining old vine cabernet on the Mount Eden property from the 1990 through the 2000 vintages, keeping separate the last of the old original plantings from the La Questa Vineyard for a bottling of their own, which Martin Ray had put in at the property from the early 1950s through 1962 (when the last of his cabernet planting was completed). As the new cabernet vineyard came on line in 1990 (which had been planted in 1980), Jeffrey felt it would be interesting to follow the old vines on their own from the Martin Ray days and this gave birth to the “Old Vine Reserve” bottling. This lasted for eleven vintages, before the last of these feeble old vines had to be grubbed up and the vineyard replanted. Keep in mind that prior to the 1990 vintage, the 1980-planted vineyards were not blended into the Estate bottling of cabernet, so in essence, the Old Vine Reserve was a continuation of the previous iterations of the Estate cabernet here and the 1990 Estate was the point of departure, with a different vineyard source, for that cuvée (though I should note that stylistically I have never noted any difference from the difference in cabernet age, and really ascribe slight stylistic swings more to the incorporation of other Bordeaux varieties in the blend). Since the first vintage in 1990, Jeffrey Patterson raised his Old Vine Reserve cabernet entirely in new wood for a full two years of elevage, prior to bottling it without fining or filtration. During the stretch from 1990 to 2000, there were enough old vines still left at Mount Eden to produce between three and five hundred cases of the Old Vine Reserve cabernet. When this vineyard was finally grubbed up in 2001, there was an almost ten year hiatus before it could



*be replanted, as one of the partners was building a house on the property that prevented replanting, and when the vineyard was finally replanted in 2010, pinot noir was put in here in this plot, rather than cabernet sauvignon.*

### **1997 Mount Eden Vineyards “Old Vine Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The grapes for the 1997 Old Vine Reserve were harvested on September 30<sup>th</sup> in this vintage and produced 407 cases. The wine is just starting to blossom into its peak period of drinkability, as the bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of cassis, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, a touch of balsam bough, gentle tariness, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and beautifully sappy at the core, with fine soil signature, moderate tannins and simply superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and complex finish. This is a brilliant wine in the making, and though it is just entering its apogee of peak drinkability, there are probably a good forty years still to go for this wine and there is most emphatically no rush to be opening bottles today! 2016-2055+. **95+**.

### **1996 Mount Eden Vineyards “Old Vine Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon**

Mount Eden only made three hundred cases of their very fine, old vine cabernet in the 1996 vintage, and at age sixteen the wine is starting to really come into its own and fulfill its early promise. This wine is produced from forty year-old vines and is one hundred percent cabernet, with the vintage yielding very low yields of less than one ton per acre. The blossoming nose offers up a deep and very classy blend of cassis, dark berries, cigar ash, incipient notes of chipotle pepper, fresh herb tones and a fine base of stony soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still moderately tannic, with an excellent core of fruit, fine complexity and focus, excellent balance and impressive grip on the very long and classy finish. This is a classic vintage of Mount Eden cabernet, and while it is really starting to soften nicely, I would be inclined to give it another handful of years to more fully allow the tannins to fall away. Impressive and still on the young side. 2016-2040. **93+**.

### **1995 Mount Eden Vineyards “Old Vine Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1995 growing season was a long and cool year, with the old vines for this cuvée picked on October 31<sup>st</sup> and 442 cases produced. The wine is stellar and at age twenty-one, just now getting ready for primetime drinking. The complex and very pure nose soars from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, cassis, menthol, dried eucalyptus, tobacco leaf, cigar smoke and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really shows some old vine sappiness at the core, with suave, melting tannins, impeccable focus and grip, blossoming complexity and a very, very long and very refined finish. Another absolutely gorgeous bottle of cabernet! 2016-2050+. **95+**.

### **1990 Mount Eden Vineyards “Old Vine Reserve” Cabernet Sauvignon**

The 1990 Old Vine Reserve was the very first bottle to be designated as such, as the vineyards planted in 1980 were finally old enough to go into the Estate Cabernet. This is more leafy and tobaccoey in personality than the 1997 or 1995 versions, but equally deep and classy, as it delivers a superb aromatic constellation of dark berries, cigar ash, a touch of youthful bell pepper, a superbly complex base of soil tones, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and even a bit more structured today than the '95, with still a bit of youthful tannin buried in a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance and a very, very long, classy finish. I would actually still give this vintage of Old Vine Reserve at least a few more years in the cellar to let the tannins further fall away before I started to drink this in earnest. Another stellar wine. 2018-2060. **95+**.

**RECENTLY TASTED RIGHT BANK GEMS  
2008 BACK TO 1947 AND VINTAGE GUIDE**



*The beautiful entrance to the cellars at Château Ausone, carved right into the limestone and with vines above.*

In the midst of writing last issue's feature on Château Latour à Pomerol, I had the opportunity to wade through some of my recent tasting books and realized that I have been drinking a lot of excellent Right Bank Bordeaux in the last few months. As I am fortunate enough to taste a fairly heavy volume of wines over the course of each year, I do not always have immediate use for some tasting notes and frequently hold them back until I have a sufficient number of like-minded notes to comprise an article on the region. I was getting near the tipping point for a general article on the Right Bank a couple of months ago, before my good friend Victor Lederer suggested that we drink some Pomerol and St. Émilion together with one of our long-standing tasting groups, which provided more than enough notes to put this article together. I dearly love traditionally-made Right Bank wines and really wish that Messieurs Rolland and Deroncourt, (who collectively mar so many wines these days in Pomerol and St. Émilion with their modernist consultancies) would just go off and buy tropical islands somewhere and enjoy their sunsets, so that more estates could go back to producing classically-styled claret. The only recent notes from Right Bank estates that do not appear in this feature are those from the 1981 and 1986 vintages, as one of my tasting groups (again at Victor's impetus!) recently put together

a fine tour of the '81 vintage to commemorate their thirty-fifth birthdays and I now have enough notes on the vintage to revisit it in its own article in a coming issue. Similarly, the 1986s will get their own article a bit later in the year.

I should take a moment to set the playing field on the Right Bank of Bordeaux these days, as a couple of my favorite estates have made transitions in the last couple of vintages and consequently, a few more of the great, old school producers of yesteryear can no longer be counted upon to necessarily craft traditionally-styled wines these days. As readers will recall, I sent out a poll after coverage of the 2012 *En Primeur* campaign asking whether or not they would like me to continue to cover Bordeaux's newest vintage each year, or utilize that travel time in the spring in Europe to cover other regions, and the overwhelming response was to let go of *En Primeur* and spend those ten days to two weeks in Europe on wines from other regions. Consequently, I have not been able to taste two of the great, old school estates on the Right Bank- Figeac and La Conseillante- since they turned over the keys to their *chais* to Michel Rolland, beginning with the 2013 vintages. I have a very hard time imagining that either estate will be improved in the minds of lovers of classical claret by the addition of the Rolland technique at each estate, but have not yet tasted any of their wines in their new Rolland consultancy era and so cannot definitively say that these two estates are now gone over to the dark side. And of course, my favorite Bordeaux property from either bank is no longer with us, Château Magdelaine, despite several notes on their celestial wines included in the roster of great wines listed below. So, in some respects, this article is a tribute to the Right Bank of yesteryear, as the already too small number of old school producers in Pomerol and St. Émilion has been further reduced as a few more producers have fallen into the modernist consultancy camp in the last few vintages. Happily, as Bordeaux is made in such larger quantity than regions such as Burgundy, even at these smaller properties on the Right Bank, many of the wines below can still be found in the market or at auction, so there remains possibilities for searching out classically-styled older vintages from some of these recent converts to the modernist camp and adding them to your cellar.

Let me put together a quick vintage guide to vintages on the Right Bank, as they can be a bit different than those on the Left Bank and often the two are lumped together when they are quite different in general quality. This does not cover every recent vintage, as I have not been to Bordeaux now for a couple of years and did not visit regularly prior to starting my newsletter, so there are some holes in my tasting experience of the Right Bank in the earliest years of the twenty-first century, not to mention the last three vintages. But, at least of the vintages I am intimately familiar with on this side of the Gironde, here is my take on the style and quality of the vintages as they pertain exclusively to the Right Bank, (with the obvious caveat that most of the modernist estates here cannot make decent wine even in the finest years these days, as they are so hampered by their ham-fisted methodologies):

**2012-** This is a very good and quite elegant year on the Right Bank, with the wines very complete and destined to be classically-balanced and lovely additions to the cellar. It is one of the fine sleeper vintages on the Right Bank in recent times.

**2011-** This is the second of two extreme drought vintages in a row on the Right Bank, and though the heavier clay soils of Pomerol have withstood the drought a bit better than in regions

with better-drained soils such as the Graves, this is not a great year on this side of the Gironde. There are some well-made wines, in the context of the limitations of the vintage's period of hydric stress, but 2012 is a decided step up from 2011 in general terms.

**2010-** This is the most overrated and disappointing vintage on the Right Bank in years. The wines have turned out very extreme in style, again due primarily to severe drought conditions in midsummer that caused blockage of the maturation of the grapes and produced very green and underripe tannins in the bunches later in the year. *Vignerons* had their hands forced in 2010 and there was no viable option other than letting the grapes continue to hang as the sugars climbed to extraordinary levels, so that the tannins could lose some of their astringency and ripen up a bit. By the time picking got underway, there were plenty of dehydrated grapes in the bunches, which concentrated sugars, tannins and acids, so the wines are extreme and very heady. Consequently, the 2010s have the highest level of measured tannins in the history of Bordeaux, very high acids and unprecedented alcohol levels as well, with many Right Bank wines north of fifteen percent alcohol. The wines seem likely to implode with bottle age, but because of the very high tannin levels, are not approachable in their youth. I cannot foresee them ever giving much pleasure.

**2009-** The 2009 vintage is another very ripe year in the Right Bank, but in comparison to 2010, the wines are far better-balanced and more interesting. However, the wines are higher in alcohol than previous ripe vintages such as 1989, and for that reason, 2009 is not likely to ever be quite as complete as the former vintage. I liked these wines quite well out of cask, in their riper guise, but as I have revisited the odd 2009 over the last couple of years, I have found that the alcohol levels (usually between fourteen and 14.5 percent for the more classically styled wines) starting to be a bit more obtrusive than I found in their earliest days, and I have liked the wines a bit less as a result. Perhaps this is only a phase and the alcohol will once again get better buried in the bodies of the wines with more bottle age, but it may well be that this is just a bit too heady to ever be a truly strong vintage on the Right Bank. But, that said. 2009 is far superior to 2010 in Pomerol and St. Émilion.

**2008-** The 2008 Bordeaux vintage is outstanding and the finest in the last decade. The summer was far from ideal, with a very cool August causing quite a bit of delay in the ripening process, but absolutely superb weather in both September and October eventually delivering a classic vintage of beautiful ripeness, shape and suave structural attributes. The wines will age long and gracefully, and though the Right Bank wines are still too young for primetime drinking, their potential is manifest. A very, very fine vintage in the making.

**2007-** The 2007 vintage in Bordeaux is not bad at all and there are several very good examples to be found on the Right Bank (though no recent notes in the article that follows). It is a year of middleweight wines who saw their maturity arrive late, but nowhere near as completely as was the case in 2008. Nevertheless, there can be some very nice, medium-bodied wines to be found in 2007 amongst the traditionalists on the Right Bank, and if the price is right and one does not need a demand notable weight in their claret, there is plenty of pleasure to be found amongst the better 2007s.

**2006-** This is a very good vintage and one that still needs some time in the cellar to blossom. The biggest problem with the quite classic 2006s on the Right Bank is that they followed hard on the

heels of the legendary 2005 vintage and the marketplace was not really all that interested. The 2006s have fine depth of fruit, good structures and plenty of *terroir* to be found in their personalities, and only suffer in comparison to the supreme quality of the 2005s. It is a fine sleeper vintage, which can often be found in Bordeaux history when good years come in the wake of great vintages. I would still rank 2008 over 2006 in Pomerol and St. Émilion, as the '08s are a bit more complete and refined, but there is a lot to like in this quite classic vintage.

**2005-** A great, great year on both sides of the Gironde, 2005 will prove to be a very long-lived and legendary vintage in the fullness of time, but these wines remain woefully too young for drinking today and still need a long period of hibernation in the cellar. It is a year of great purity and ripeness, uncharacteristically tied to really tangy acidities, which give the wines a vibrancy that is quite rare in riper Bordeaux vintages. Like the 2005 vintage in Burgundy, the '05s on the Right Banks are legends in the making, but most require at least another decade or more in the cellar to start to stir.

**2003-** The very, very hot summer of 2003 produced big, buxom and pretty disappointing wines on both sides of the Gironde, with a roasted quality to the aromatic and flavor profiles of most of the wines, low acids and chewy tannins. I have not tasted widely on the Right Bank in 2003, but the wines I have tried have generally been okay, but no better. I would rather drink a 2007 than a 2003 at most estates.

**2001-** The 2001 vintage is another year that suffers from following on the heels of a highly-acclaimed vintage. This is really a beautiful year on the Right Bank and all of the recent examples I have tasted from 2001 have been outstanding wines. Most are not quite ready for primetime drinking, but are getting pretty close and there is already pleasure to be found in the glass if one opens a bottle of 2001 Pomerol or St. Émilion today. Fine depth of fruit, lovely soil signatures, classy structures and plenty of aromatic and flavor complexity are the hallmarks of the 2001 Right Bank wines and this is an excellent vintage. I might give the slight nod to the 2008 vintage here, but the 2001s are pretty close in quality and this is a vintage to be adding to the cellar right now, as there remains pretty good stocks scattered around in the pipeline.

**2000-** Maybe 2000 is a great vintage on the Right Bank, but the wines are very closed right now and I am not sure if they will ever emerge from their dark and temperamental hibernation to deliver the same pedigree and complexity as the far more suave and classic 2001s. The 2000 vintage certainly produced deeper and more muscular wines than 2001, with higher tannin levels and more inherent power, but the vintage is quite hunkered down and dumb at the present time and more bottle age is needed before the true shape of the vintage comes into proper focus. As this is not a vintage that I tasted *En Primeur* and can only rely on notes from bottled wines, many of which were quite sullen and closed when I tasted them, I do not have a great sense of just how good the best 2000 Right Bank wines will be when they finally open. But, they decidedly need more bottle age before that will occur.

**1998-** This is a great, great vintage on the Right Bank (and also in the Graves) and likely to rank up as one of the greatest of the last fifty years on this side of the Gironde. The top classically styled wines from 1998 in both Pomerol and St. Émilion are certainly approachable today, but are still very young wines to my palate and I would strongly urge folks to leave them sleeping in

the cellar for another decade's worth of bottle age. They are going to be such great wines that it just seems silly to be opening them now, when they are still climbing in quality and complexity.

**1995-** I really love the 1995 vintage on the Right Bank, which I find quite classic in profile and nicely structured. Many wines are starting to show very nicely now that they are safely past their twentieth birthdays, but this is still a vintage that will continue to improve as it blossoms with further bottle age, and it makes sense to let the wines continue to rest in the cellar and reach for vintages that are more completely into their plateaus of peak maturity. Tannins have always been firm, but ripe and well-integrated since day one for the 1995 Right Bank wines, but most wines show impeccable balance and all that is needed is enough bottle age to allow the wines to fully blossom. I would generally wait another five years for the quality equivalent of the Second Growths on the Right Bank and ten more for the quality equivalents of the Firsts (such as Ausone, Cheval Blanc, Pétrus, Lafleur and Trotanoy).

**1993-** I do not know a lot about the 1993 Bordeaux vintage, as this was the era when I specialized almost exclusively in the wines of Burgundy and Piemonte, but based on the handful of 1993s that I have tasted from the Right Bank, this is a sleeper vintage on this side of the Gironde and I would keep an eye out for these wines. The small handful of '93s I have tasted have reminded me stylistically of the same vintage in Brunello and Barolo, with the wines more middleweight in personality, but complete, balanced and quite complex and true to their underlying *terroirs*. These are wines I am on the lookout for to taste with more regularity, as what I have tried in recent years have really been very, very pleasant surprises.

**1990-** A very good, but not a great vintage on the Right Bank. Initially, the 1990s seemed more classic and less roasted in personality than the 1989s, but they have gotten more marked by the heat of the summer of 1990 with the passage of time and do not seem today to possess the same depth at the core as their corresponding 1989s. Most of the 1990 Right Bank wines are now fully mature (or getting quite close in the case of the First Growth quality estates) and are drinking very well, but there is an extra dimension to the 1989s.

**1989-** This vintage has aged far more gracefully than I would have ever imagined, based on how the wines showed in their youth, and this is now one of the great vintages of the last thirty or forty years on the Gironde. In the magical decade of the 1980s in Bordeaux, 1989 is clearly in the same exalted class as the 1985s and 1982s, and there may well be examples from '89 that can outclass their counterparts from the other two top Right Bank vintages. Today, the 1989s have gained with bottle age to show lovely purity, complexity and impressively refined structural aspects and really are not all that dissimilar from the 1982s, with the latter vintage certainly more evolved today and perhaps a touch more elegant across the board. But, 1989 is clearly a great Right Bank vintage and one that is starting to really drink with great style today, despite having decades and decades of life still ahead of it.

**1988-** 1988 is a good vintage on the Right Bank and probably a tad better, amongst the traditionalists, than their counterparts on the Left Bank. The wines are generally cooler in profile, due to less ripeness than either 1989 or 1990, but the wines are in general quite complete in their vintage profiles and quite enjoyable to drink today. The best have plenty of life still ahead of them, but this is a good year for current drinking on the Right Bank.



**1986-** This is more of a middling vintage on the Right Bank, as 1986 is far stronger on the other side of the Gironde than in Pomerol or St. Émilion. This is not to say that I have not drunk some very enjoyable 1986 Right Bank wines in the last few years, with wines such as l'Arrosée, Canon, Figeac, La Conseillante, Vieux Château Certan and a few others quite tasty. But, in general, the tannins can be just a touch dry-edged on the Right Bank in 1986 and there is not the same depth of ripe fruit to buffer them here as is the case on the Left Bank, so this is a vintage where one has to look for the beauty amongst the imperfections. Most 1986 Right Bank wines I have drunk in recent times are now ready, though with a bit of tannin still evident, and my gut feeling is that the fruit will not outlive the tannins here and the next decade or so may be one of the prime moments for drinking this vintage of Pomerols and St. Émilions. Not a great year, but there are some very tasty wines still to be found from '86.



**1985-** The 1985 vintage on the Right Bank is really beautiful and to my palate, as interesting in its own way as either 1989 or 1982. It is not an overtly powerful year, but the wines have aged very, very gracefully and offer up today beautiful perfume and complexity on the nose, great purity of fruit and plenty of soil signature on their suave and vibrant palates. As I noted a couple of years ago in my article on the Bordeaux vintage of '85, the Right Bank wines here have seemed to put on mid-palate weight with bottle age, as well as show more structural bounce than was the case fifteen years ago, and the vintage is far more interesting to drink today than was the case in its youth. This vintage suffered a bit from such lovely balance early on, in that the wines



were very, very easy to drink when young, and may well have been downgraded a bit for this in other commentary circles. However, today there is an awful lot to love about the 1985 Right Bank wines and this is clearly one of the most refined vintages for current drinking. The top Right Bank classicists will continue to cruise along in bottle for another thirty to forty years.

**1983-** The 1983 vintage on the Right Bank is probably a good half step behind the quality of the wines on the Left Bank, but this is not a bad year by any stretch of the imagination for Pomerol and St. Émilion and there are some very good wines to be found in each commune. I have not tasted too many 1983s of late on this side of the Gironde, beyond those for domaine profiles such as Trotanoy, Magdelaine and Canon, or for the '83 vintage article that I wrote back in October of 2013. In general, '83 is stronger in St. Émilion than Pomerol in my experience, with majestic wines such as Ausone and Cheval Blanc as good as anything produced in Bordeaux in this vintage.

**1982-** A great, great year on the Right Bank, the 1982s offer everything one could ask for from a Pomerol or St. Émilion and there is nothing not to like about this vintage. The wines, for the most part, are now well into their apogees, offering brilliant drinking, but will continue to cruise along for many more decades and there is emphatically no rush to be drinking up one's '82s.

**1981-** A better year on the Right Bank than on the Left, these wines are really very enjoyable for drinking now and over the next fifteen to twenty years. More of a middleweight vintage, rather than an overtly powerful one, but with the top wines offering up lovely aromatic and flavor complexity, velvety palate impressions and lovely bounce and grip. Even some of the top wines can be a bit short in 1981, when looked at in the context of top flight years like 1982 or 1985, but there is a lot of pleasure to be found in this vintage on the Right Bank at the present time. I have a lot of recent notes on 1981s from Pomerol and St. Émilion, but will save those notes for an updated report on the vintage at age thirty-five in one of the upcoming issues.

**1979-** The 1979 vintage on the Right Bank and in the Graves is probably better than it is on the Left Bank and I have had some lovely wines from this vintage from both St. Émilion and Pomerol. This was a big crop, with yields about the same as in 1970, and another throwback vintage in Bordeaux where the picking did not get started until early October. April had been very cold and pushed the start of the season back, but by June the weather was splendid and flowering took place under ideal conditions. The month of August was damp and dismal, retarding ripening and this is what pushed the harvest back into October. In the last few years I have had some beautiful '79 Right Bank wines, led by Trotanoy, Certan de May and Ausone. The vintage has been fully mature for years, but the top Right Bank '79s still have plenty of life in them.

**1978-** The 1978 vintage in Bordeaux was dubbed the "Miracle Vintage" back when it was first introduced onto the market, as the very cool summer caused a decided lag in the maturity of the bunches on the vine and it was only a beautiful Indian Summer that allowed the grapes to ripen adequately and the wines to turn out fairly well. Over the years, the 1978s have gotten a bit less interesting, as the decades have rolled by and have shown the vintage to be not quite ripe physiologically as one might have hoped. So there has arisen a bit of *herbacité* in many 1978s in their apogees, which was a bit less evident when the wines had a bit more puppy fat to cover up

the lack of complete ripeness. That said, I have had really lovely bottles of Vieux Château Certan, Trotanoy, Latour à Pomerol and Lafleur-Pétrus in the last several months, which seemed quite complete (and less leafy) than other '78 Right Banks that I can recall, so maybe there are more ringing successes out there from the vintage. In general, this is a good, solid and quite drinkable vintage on the Right Bank, but not special for most wines, with some really fine, high water marks.

**1975-** This is one of my absolute favorite vintages in Pomerol, and it is not bad in St. Émilion either! The vintage has not aged anywhere near as well on the Left Bank as it has on the Right Bank, and consequently, the 1975s from the eastern side of the Gironde tend to get overlooked a bit when one speaks of great regional vintages. There are some very good 1975 St. Émilions, led perhaps by Magdelaine, but I have not tasted as deeply in this commune as I have of the '75s from Pomerol, which are unequivocally brilliant. My absolute favorites in Pomerol from this vintage are Pétrus, Trotanoy, l'Évangile and Lafleur (in that order), but there are superb wines at most of the top traditionalist addresses in the commune in 1975. This is probably the very last, old-fashioned Pomerol vintage, with the wines showing more of the muscle and broad shoulders that were hallmarks of the commune back in the 1940s and 1950s. The '75 Pomerols possess just a bit of the chewy tannin that defines the vintage on the Left Bank, but here they are buried in thick fruit and the wines are complete and stunning. The 1975 St. Émilions can range from a touch sinewy, like their counterparts on the Left Bank, to more complete and fine-tuned in balance, like the best Pomerols. The thing that impressed me most about Nicole Kidman a few years ago (when I did a wine tasting for her at her apartment), was that she had a euro-cave that included a case of '75 Pétrus waiting for current consumption. Almost made me want to study acting!

**1971-** The 1971 vintage is one of those forgotten vintages that were supposed to all be drunk up in their relative youths, but which more than forty-five years on from the vintage, continue to delight. I have had such beautiful wines in the last few years from both sides of the Gironde from this vintage, that I certainly have no preference for one over the other. This was a small crop, which may account for the better than anticipated longevity of the '71s, despite it being a vintage that was quite low in acidity. In early tastings, David Peppercorn noted that the 1971s were often preferred over the more structured and concentrated 1970s. Perhaps, like the 2001 vintage, the 1971s have always been in the shadow of their twin vintage of 1970 and this is one of the reasons that the wines do not get a lot of respect in the marketplace, but all of the 1971 Right Bank wines I have had in the last several years have been excellent and are still at their apogees. Contrary to popular wisdom, this is a vintage that does not need drinking up anytime soon.

**1970-** The 1970 vintage on the Right Bank is outstanding and probably, along with 1975, the finest in Pomerol in this decade and stands alone at the summit for St. Émilion in the 1970s. The vintage was considered a very large crop at the time, perhaps a harbinger of things to come later in this decade and on into the 1980s? The wines have open and closed over the decades since their first blush of maturity in the mid-1980s, and there have been periods (much like the 1985 Burgundies) when I thought it was time to drink up the 1970s, only to see them rally and seemingly deepen on the palate and show more overt structure ten years further down the road. Today, the top 1970 clarets have never drunk better than they do at the present time, and this is especially true of the multitude of gems from the Right Bank. It is a great, classic vintage and

one that is magnificent for drinking right now, but with many more decades of pleasure still to come.

**1967-** This was a very early drinking vintage of wines that really were not bad at all, and I am sure following on the heels of the structured 1966s, the best '67s were quite welcome in the market for the early pleasure that they delivered. Other than Latour and Haut-Brion, the best wines of 1967 these days are to be found on the Right Bank, where there are really some lovely middleweights still to be savored, such as Magdelaine and Figeac, but the finest example of the vintage that I have ever tasted is Château Trotanoy- which is utterly brilliant! Château Pétrus is another '67 that has a reputation that transcends the vintage, but I have never had the pleasure to taste the wine. Most '67s on the Right Bank want drinking up in the relative near-term, but the magnificent Trotanoy has decades of life still ahead of it.

**1966-** This is a lovey vintage in both Pomerol and St. Émilion and the wines are quite underrated and are drinking beautifully at the present time. The Achilles' Heel of the '66 vintage for quite some time was slightly high acidity, which kept the fruit a touch buttoned up behind the structural aspects of the wines<sup>4</sup>, but this has never really been as much of an issue on the Right Bank as on the Left. I have had many, many stunning 1966 Right Bank wines in the last several years, led most recently by superb bottles of Latour à Pomerol, Figeac, Trotanoy and Ausone, and this is a vintage that I rank very, very highly on the Right Bank. Interestingly, the one wine that has never really sang for me from 1966 on this side of the Gironde has been Pétrus, which has always seemed a bit four-square and malty in character, but it has now been many years since I last tasted it and perhaps it was just in an extended period of adolescence?

**1964-** The 1964 vintage is a great year on the Right Bank. I am not sure how many people recall, but 1964 was the year where the summer was so beautiful and the grapes were so promising in mid-September that the French Ministry of Agriculture pronounced 1964 "the vintage of the century" in Bordeaux. This was before picking got underway on the Right Bank on the 21<sup>st</sup> of the month. Apparently Mother Nature is not without a sense of irony, as the skies opened up on October 8<sup>th</sup> and it poured and poured until the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month. Fortunately for the Right Bank, most estates had already finished picking their earlier ripening merlot and cabernet franc before the rains and it is indeed a superb vintage on this side of the Gironde, but over in the Médoc, most estates had not yet finished and many wines ended up diluted from the heavy rains. The '64 Right Bank wines continue to drink beautifully today, though at more than fifty years of age, I am not sure if I prefer them over the equally fine, but differently-styled 1966s. The '64s are bigger, more robust wines than their '66 counterparts, with marvelous depth and still good structure, but perhaps the '66s' superior elegance is a more than worthy challenge? There is absolutely no rush to drink up the best 1964 Right Bank wines, which continue to dazzle and have plenty of structural integrity to keep on drinking well for decades to come.

**1962-** Much like the 1971 vintage, the 1962 vintage has lived its entire lifetime in the shadow of its more famous, older sibling. While the '62s have never been a rival to the brilliantly pure and elegant 1961s, they have always been better than their reputations and continue to offer outstanding drinking and often, superb value at auction. This is also a fine vintage to buy without fears of fraud, as who in their right mind would fake a '62 when they could do so with a '61 and make five to ten times the profit? It was a large crop (the largest along with 1967 in the decade)

and a rather indifferent growing season was made up for with a superb Indian Summer. In this regard, perhaps 1962 is a bit like 2008? The wines drank fairly well from an early age, but have always possessed good structure underneath and have aged at a nicely relaxed pace and continue to drink beautifully at nearly fifty-five years of age. Like the '66s, there is no rush to drink them anytime soon, as they will continue to cruise along beautifully.



*The sun breaking through over the vineyards of Château Corbin.*

**1961-** One of the greatest two or three vintages of the twentieth century, 1961 is a legend that is everything it is made out to be. The crop was very small, due to a poor flowering, which gave the wines superb depth and concentration, while the picture perfect growing season supplied a degree of elegance that only 1953 can rival. It is a stupendous vintage on the Right Bank, and though I do not taste these wines with any regularity, I have been fortunate to taste many of the top wines from St. Émilion and Pomerol down through the years. The wines remain at their apogees and have years and years of life ahead of them, with all of the perfume, purity and breed that only the very greatest vintages in Bordeaux can deliver. As readers may recall from recent articles on Trotanoy and Latour à Pomerol, it is a legendary vintage for those two estates, and the 1961 Pétrus (which I have only had the good fortune to drink on one occasion) is everything one can imagine it to be. Most recently, the Figeac, Magdelaine, Bélair and Canon all stood out for their magnificence, with all of them amongst the very greatest vintages I have ever tasted from these great estates.

**1959-** The reputation of the 1959 vintage on the Right Bank is not as great as it is on the Left Bank, perhaps because of the extreme frost damage done in 1956 in Pomerol? Nevertheless, I have had some superb '59s from the Right Bank over the years and do not find them off the pace of the 1964s, 1966s or 1970s in Pomerol and St. Émilion. As I discussed in the last issue's article on Château Latour à Pomerol, many of the replanted vineyards in Pomerol and the nearby sector of St. Émilion were "third leaf" in 1959, which traditionally produces the finest concentration from young vines for the first twenty years after their replanting, and this may be the reason that I have had such excellent results with the '59 Right Bank wines that I have tasted. Like their counterparts on the Left Bank, there is absolutely no rush to drink up the 1959s from the Right Bank and this is actually a bit of an underrated vintage for these two communes.

**Older Vintages-** I have had some nice bottles of Right Bank wines from 1957, which were not great, but better than the generally charmless Left Bank wines in this vintage. 1955 I do not taste with any regularity, but the few I have had from Pomerol and St. Émilion have been lovely. I have had far more examples of the 1953 vintage from the Left Bank (which I adore here), and the reputation of the Right Bank is not as strong as that of the Médoc and Graves. As I have no recent notes, I can only keep my eyes open for possibilities in the future, but I should note that the 1953 Vieux Château Certan drunk a few years back was stellar. 1952 is another vintage that is superior on the Right Bank than on the Left Bank (much like 1964), and I have had some very good '52s down through the years, though no sound bottles in the last twelve months. 1950 is a superb year on the Right Bank, or at least in Pomerol, with deep, old school wines of depth, power and robust gentility. It was a rainy summer, but the Right Bank seemed to escape the tendency on the Left for pretty, lighter-styled wines, and wines such as 1950 Pétrus, Vieux Château Certan and Lafleur are amongst the greatest wines I have had the pleasure to taste from this era in Bordeaux. I cannot recall tasting a 1950 from St. Émilion, so I am not sure if the vintage was more Left Bank-like or Pomerol-like in this commune. 1949 is a great year in Bordeaux on both sides of the Gironde and the Right Bank '49s that I have tasted are outstanding and continue to cruise along beautifully. It is a very, very elegant vintage on the Left Bank, and I have found this also to be the case with the '49 Cheval Blanc and Vieux Château Certan, but in general, most Right Bank wines in this era were made in a more robust style than is the case today and so the inherent elegance of the 1949 vintage was not quite as apparent in these wines (excepting the supremely elegant Cheval). Well-stored bottles of 1949s continue to dazzle and have plenty of life in them. 1948 is another outstanding vintage, with the wines reported by David Peppercorn to have been quite structured and chewy out of the blocks and not showing the same elegance as the '47s and '49s that sandwiched the vintage. I have not drunk deeply in this vintage, but the Cheval Blanc and VCC '48s were outstanding on the couple of occasions that I have had the good luck to drink them. 1947 has an outstanding reputation, and perhaps the wines were more elegant in their earlier days, but by the time I had a chance to taste them, I did not find the same refinement in them as has been so apparent in the 1949s that have crossed my path. The '47s were supposed to be very accessible and attractive in their collective youths, which was most welcomed at the time, as the '45s were deep and properly structured out of the blocks. The most famous 1947 is the larger than life Cheval Blanc, which I have drunk on several occasions, but it has never moved me the same way as the 1949 from this estate or any of the brilliant VCCs made in the 1945 to 1950 stretch. The 1945 vintage is magical on both the Right and Left Banks, though due to the very small crop in this vintage, I have not tasted a ton of Right Bank wines

from this great, great year. But those that I have drunk are amongst the greatest wines I have tasted from Bordeaux.

*The following tasting notes are arranged chronologically by vintage, from youngest to oldest, and then alphabetically within each vintage subset. I have not included notes on wines that have been written up for domaine features such as those on Châteaux Latour à Pomerol, Trotanoy or Magdelaine that I have completed in the last year or two, so that only notes on bottles most recently tasted from these estates are included here. As mentioned at the outset, I am also working on articles on both the 1986 and 1981 Bordeaux vintages to be published later this year to commemorate their thirtieth and thirty-fifth anniversaries respectively, and so Right Bank notes from those two vintages do not appear here. There are also no notes on the 1985 vintage below, as I just completed an article on that superb vintage and have not been opening any bottles out of my cellar since raiding it in preparation for that article.*

### **2008 Château Corbin (St. Émilion)**

As readers know, I clearly rank the 2008 vintage in Bordeaux over both the '09 and '10 vintages, which are riper, more heady and far less classic in profile than the exquisitely balanced '08s. The 2008 Corbin is a classic example of this fine vintage, offering up a youthfully promising bouquet of cherries, menthol, tobacco leaf, a fine base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and focused finish. This wine is just beginning to blossom and is still a few years from starting to drink with generosity, but it will be excellent once it starts to stir. 2018-2040. **92.**

### **2008 Château Latour à Pomerol (Pomerol)**

Having just written an estate profile of Château Latour à Pomerol, where I mentioned that I had not tasted the 2008, but was certain that it would prove to be an excellent vintage for this fine estate. A couple weeks later, lo and behold, I cross paths with a bottle of the '08! The wine is indeed excellent, offering up a fine nose of black cherries, plums, dark soil tones, cigar wrapper and a nice touch of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, ripe, moderate tannins, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, pure and youthful finish. This is a bit behind the 2008 Corbin in terms of development and will need a bit longer in the cellar before it blossoms, but it should prove to be an excellent wine. 2022-2050+. **92+.**

### **2006 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)**

The 2006 vintage at La Conseillante is extremely successful and this is a very fine follow-up to the great wine produced here in 2005. The bouquet of the 2006 is pure, elegant and complex, delivering a fine blend of black raspberries, cassis, cigar smoke, a fine base of gravelly soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and impressively transparent, with a fine core of fruit, excellent focus and balance and a very long, ripely tannic and classic finish. Fine juice in the making. 2020-2060+. **93.**

### **2006 Château la Dominique (St. Émilion)**

I drank quite a bit of La Dominique back in the vintages of the 1980s, but the estate does not make wines in the same league today as they did back then. The 2006 la Dominique is a pretty disappointing effort in this fine vintage, offering up a dull and roasted nose of dark berries, coffee grounds, damp soil, hung game and a generous serving of nutty new oak. On the palate

the wine is deep, fullish and hollow at the core, with moderate length, slightly dry-edged tannins and a quite pedestrian, modest finish. I assume that the estate started emulating the Rolland formula (or perhaps hired the wizard as consultant) of malo in barrel, micro-oxygenation and other parlor tricks to pump up the volume of the wine early on, only to compromise its ability to age gracefully. Whatever the reason, the 2006 la Dominique is a failure. 2013-2020. **81.**

#### **2006 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

The 2006 Château Figeac is a classic in the making. The very promising nose wafts from the glass in a constellation of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, gravel, tobacco leaf and a touch of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with very good focus, impeccable balance and a long, pure and moderately tannic finish. I love vintages of Figeac with the shape and bounce that the 2006 displays out of the blocks, as they always age beautifully! 2023-2065+. **93.**

#### **2006 Vieux Château Certan (Pomerol)**

The 2006 VCC is a superb wine in the making and has all of the earmarks of an utterly classic rendition of this fine *terroir*. The bouquet is a deep and youthfully complex blend of cassis, dark berries, tobacco leaf, a touch of mint, dark soil tones, espresso, cigar smoke and a touch of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and intensely flavored, with a good core, suave tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. Monsieur Thienpont notes that “2006 was a cabernet franc vintage for us” and this is abundantly clear in the style and shape of this lovely vintage of VCC. Just add further bottle age. 2022-2075. **93+.**

#### **2005 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)**

The 2005 vintage of La Conseillante is a great wine in the making, with this estate’s elegant and always transparent personality very much in evidence in this outstanding year. The bouquet is deep, pure and superb, offering up notes of raspberries, black cherries, gravelly soil tones, tobacco leaf, a touch of menthol and a judicious framing of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with a fine core, superb soil signature, tangy acids and great length and grip on the poised and moderately tannic finish. This is a brilliant vintage for La Conseillante. 2020-2055+. **95.**

#### **2005 Château Corbin (St. Émilion)**

The 2005 vintage at Corbin should prove to be the greatest year here since Annabelle Bardinet Cruse took over the family estate in 1999. There is a level of depth and purity here that is truly exceptional and clearly indicates that Corbin has good *terroir* with which to work. The bouquet is deep, primary and youthfully closed, offering up a blend of black cherries, dark berries, cigar smoke, espresso, a fine base of soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with impeccable balance, tangy acids and great length and grip on the ripely tannic and focused finish. There is a degree of power in the 2005 Corbin, coupled to great precision, that is truly exceptional. But, give this young and very promising wine plenty of time in the cellar to blossom. 2025-2075. **93+.**

#### **2005 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

Of the recent, highly-praised vintages in Bordeaux- 2000, 2005, 2009 and 2010, only the 2005 vintage stands out for me as a truly great vintage on the Gironde, with the others masquerading power and overripe fruit as if it were true greatness in the making. However, 2005 is a completely different animal and this is really and truly a great year, but one that is built for the very long haul. It is very rare for a Bordeaux vintage to offer outstanding acidity and



excellent ripeness in the same vintage (unless it is a pruney drought year like 2010, which is okay if one wants Amarone, rather than claret). The 2005 Figeac is a perfect example of just how great this vintage is on both sides of the Gironde, as it offers up a deep and stunning bouquet of black cherries, plums, dark chocolate, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely nascent complexity peeking out from behind its closed structure. The finish is very, very long, tangy and ripely tannic, with impeccable balance and enormous potential. A great Figeac and a great homage to the superb job that Éric d'Aramon did during his days at the helm here. 2025-2100. **97.**

### **2005 Château Tournefeuille (Lalande de Pomerol)**

Château Tournefeuille is one of the finest estates in Lalande de Pomerol, but I have had a few vintages in more recent times that have been a bit over-oaked and I would love to see the family here rein in their percentage of new wood a bit. However, this was not the case back in 2005, which is really a superb vintage at Tournefeuille and shows just how much potential this estate possesses. The utterly refined nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red plums, black cherries, gentle herb tones, coffee, a fine base of soil and a judicious framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, young and still closed, but with a fine core, lovely, ripe, well-integrated tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. Fine juice in the making, the 2005 Tournefeuille still needs several years in the cellar to really peak. 2020-245. **90+.**



*A sign pointing the way to the cellars at La Conseillante, with Château l'Evangile across the vineyards.*

### **2001 Château Canon (St. Émilion)**

The 2001 Canon is an outstanding example of this fine vintage, though the wine is still several years away from truly starting to blossom and drink with real generosity. The fairly primary nose shows very good promise in its blend of red and black cherries, menthol, woodsmoke, a beautiful base of limestone soil and just a touch of new oak around the edges. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and tightly-knit, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. This wine is still slumbering away in hibernation and needs a few more years before it will start to stir. 2021-2060. **93+**.

### **2001 Château Corbin (St. Émilion)**

The 2001 Château Corbin is a beautiful wine and my favorite vintage from Annabelle Bardinet Cruse for current drinking. The bouquet is pure, focused and quite sappy today, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, cocoa, menthol, woodsmoke, a touch of nutskin, lovely soil tones and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely purity at the core, modest tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and classy finish. This has a bit of Château Canon-like personality traits at this point in its evolution. A lovely wine. 2016-2035. **92**.

### **2001 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

The 2001 vintage of Figeac is outstanding and another great classic in the making. The bouquet is pure and beautifully blossoming, as it offers up scents of mint, black cherries, cigar smoke, a touch of nuttiness, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones and a bit of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and quite sappy at the core, with suave, modest tannins, lovely focus and balance and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is not a blockbuster, but a full-bodied and elegant wine that exudes the breed one expects from a great *terroir* in a top flight vintage. It is now just entering its plateau of maturity and is delicious today, but will continue to improve over the coming decades. 2014-2040. **92+**.

### **1998 Château Magdelaine (St. Émilion)**

The 1998 Château Magdelaine is a brilliant young wine and it seems very likely, at this early point in its development, that this vintage will ultimately rank as one of the greatest ever produced at this iconic estate. The bouquet is deep, pure and very elegant in profile, wafting from the glass in a nascently complex blend of black cherries, cassis, menthol, cigar smoke, Magdelaine's inimitably complex soil tones and a touch of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable balance, fine-grained tannins, lovely acids and great purity and inherent elegance on the long and vibrant finish. This is still very early days for this great wine, but it will be magical at its apogee. 2021-2060+. **95+**.

### **1998 Château Pavie (St. Émilion)**

1998 was the first vintage of Pavie under its new ownership and it is the finest example of this estate I have ever had the pleasure to taste. It is too bad that the style departed from this 1998 in the years to come, as this had potential. The bouquet is deep, ripe, but not over the top stylistically, as it offers up scents of black cherries, cassis, tobacco leaf, a nice base of soil tones, a touch of weediness and a well-managed base of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a fair bit of youthful, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. A bit more modern in style than most of the top St. Émilions that I gravitate towards, but a very well-made wine. 2018-2035+. **93**.

### **1998 Château Tournefeuille (Lalande de Pomerol)**

The 1998 Château Tournefeuille is another very strong vintage for this estate, offering up a pure and quite lovely bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, fresh herb tones, a fine base of soil, cigar ash and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and very elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely complexity, melting tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and classy finish. This is a very classy middleweight that is just now entering its plateau of peak maturity and should continue to drink well for at least a couple of decades. 2014-2035. **91.**

### **1995 Château Gazin (Pomerol)**

These days, Château Gazin makes a hybrid modern-styled wine and I find the style a bit heavy-handed, as some of the very pretty *terroir* of this underrated Pomerol cru is lost with the malolactic in barrel and other touches in the cellar to try and ramp up the volume. However, back in 1995, the wine was quite classically crafted and is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a pretty and emerging blend of plums, black cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a lovely base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and properly suave and velvety on the attack, with a good core, bright acids, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. Good juice with years and years of life still ahead. 2013-2040. **92.**

### **1993 Château Gazin (Pomerol)**

Like the 1993, the 1993 Château Gazin is a fine, classic bottle of Pomerol that is now drinking very well and was probably an absolute steal back in its day. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a deep and complex blend of cassis, saddle leather, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of cedar and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and focused, with a good core, lovely complexity and grip and a long, meltingly tannic finish. Really a lovely bottle and another example of how good the 1993s could be in the Right Bank. 2014-2035. **89.**

### **1993 Château Pétrus (Pomerol)**

I totally missed the release of the 1993 Bordeaux vintage, as back in these days, I was a wine merchant specializing in Burgundy and we only offered younger Bordeaux vintages if they were championed by Robert Parker. Having crossed paths recently with the 1993 Haut-Brion and this outstanding Pétrus, it is clear that I missed a serious opportunity with the 1993 Bordeaux vintage. The '93 Pétrus offers up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, a touch of dark berry, a beautiful base of gravelly soil tones, tobacco leaf, licorice, a touch of tar and a discreet framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and very refined, with a good core, superb focus and grip, modest tannins and outstanding length and balance on the soil-driven finish. This is a cooler fruit vintage at Pétrus and it seems to really have allowed the underlying *terroir* to play a more prominent role in the 1993. A fine, fine wine. 2014-2040+. **93.**

### **1990 Château Gombaude-Guillet (Pomerol)**

In the decade of the 1980s, Château Gombaude-Guillet was one of the great sleepers in Pomerol, and I do not know what was the cause of their fine decade then, or why they fell by the wayside in subsequent decades. In any case, from 1982 through 1990, this was a really fine value, and the 1990 continues to drink well, offering up a ripe and sappy nose of black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of balsam bough, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a deft touch of vanillin oak and a dollop of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush on the attack and fairly complex, with a sappy core, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on

the well-balanced finish. This is a tad riper at 13.5 percent than was the case with the lovely 1982 and 1985 versions, but it is still a lovely wine. 2014-2035. **91.**

### **1989 Château la Dominique (St. Émilion) Served from Jeroboam**

The 1989 Château la Dominique is quite a lovely drink today, particularly out of larger format. The wine offers up a lovely nose of ripe black cherries, dark berries, menthol, cigar ash, a touch of bell pepper, a good base of soil and a 1980's style framing of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and juicy, with a good core, very good focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic finish. Out of jeroboam, this wine still has a bit of tannin that would like to resolve further, but I imagine out of regular-sized format it is *à point* right now. 2013-2035. **91.**

### **1989 Château l'Enclos (Pomerol)**

The 1989 l'Enclos is really a lovely wine and clearly the finest vintage I have ever tasted from this estate. I have drunk it on and off over the years since the mid-1990s and it has never failed to impress, and this most recent bottle was really fine. The impressively complex bouquet offers up a classic Pomerol aromatic blend of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a bit of saddle leather, dark soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs, plenty of smokiness and a judicious base of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely broad-shouldered. With a good core of fruit, melting tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and very well-balanced finish. Since its release, the 1989 l'Enclos has been one of the great sleepers of the vintage. 2014-2035+. **92.**

### **1989 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

Out of the blocks, the '89 Figeac was never one of my favorite wines from this decade at the estate, but time has worked its magic and the wine is drinking very well today. The bouquet shows a roasted personality from the vintage's character, but plenty of complexity in its mélange of baked red and black cherries, iron soil tones, nutskins, cigar ash and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and generous, with a bit of meatiness in the mid-palate, modest tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. Good juice that is now at its apogee. 2016-2040. **92.**

### **1988 Château Certan de May (Pomerol)**

The decade of the 1980s was such a heady time for Certan de May, when the team here was really making precise and exceptional examples of Pomerol. From the 1990s forward to today, the wine has been a bit over-oaked to my palate and some of the magic is gone as a result. But, this was not an issue back in 1988, when this was one of the finest Right Bank wines produced. The bouquet is stunning, soaring from the glass in a fine blend of dark berries, black plums, a touch of bell pepper, chocolate, gravelly soil tones, woodsmoke and just a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly seamless, with a fine core of pure fruit, excellent soil signature, melting tannins and outstanding length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. 2016-2030+. **94.**

### **1982 Château Certan-Giraud (Pomerol)**

The 1982 vintage of Château Certan-Giraud is the finest I have ever tasted from this property, which today is known as Château Hosanna and owned by the Moueix family. Back in this era the property was owned by the Cruse family (of Château Corbin fame) and the '82 is a lovely example of the vintage, offering up a deep and complex nose of cherries, red plums, fresh

herb tones, coffee, menthol, a touch of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and velvety, with a fine, plush core of fruit, fine soil signature, modest tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This was more old-fashioned winemaking in this era than what one sees today from this *terroir* under the Hosanna label, but it is a fine example of an '82 Pomerol and well worth looking out for if one is fortunate enough to cross paths with a bottle. 2014-2035+. **92.**

#### **1982 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol)**

The 1982 Château Trotanoy is one of the legendary wines of this vintage. The wine remains fairly youthful and will be even better down the road, but with some time in decanter, it is very, very easy to drink this great wine today. The deep and meaty nose blossoms to unveil scents of plums, black cherries, cigar smoke, a great base of soil, gamebirds, cocoa and a nice base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in style, with a bottomless core, great focus and grip, ripe, suave tannins and seamless balance on the long and velvety finish. I should note that these bottles seemed a bit more structured than the last '82 Trotanoy I crossed paths with, back in 2013 in preparation for my article on the estate. This is a great wine that has decades and decades ahead of it, so do not drink it up too quickly! 2022-2075+. **96.**

#### **1979 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol)**

The 1979 Château Trotanoy is really a lovely example of this vintage, without the power and length of a very top vintage of this great estate, but with all the complexity and breed that one rightly expects year in and year out from this magical Pomerol property. The lovely nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red plums, cherries, mocha, gamebirds, woodsmoke, Cuban cigars, gravelly soil tones and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and quite full-bodied for the vintage, with a solid core of fruit, lovely focus and detail, melting tannins and an ever so slightly angular aspect on the finish. This is not as long or refined as a great vintage of Trotanoy, but it lacks nothing in terms of complexity on the attack or grip and purity on the finish, and really is an utterly satisfying vintage of Trot for current consumption. 2013-2025+. **92.**

#### **1978 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)**

The fine, Indian Summer conditions of 1978 were less helpful on the Right Bank than they were on the Left Bank, and so many of the '78s I have tasted from Pomerol and St. Émilion are a touch herbal from more indifferent ripening. This is the case with the '78 La Conseillante, which is still a complex and nicely soil-driven wine. The bouquet is a blend of cassis, a bit of tariness, fresh herb tones, gravel, charred earth and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still nicely suave on the attack, with a good core, fine focus and balance, melted tannins and a good, long, modestly ripe finish. I do not mind the touch of *herbacité* here, but it is certainly not a classic expression of La Conseillante. 2014-2035. **89.**

#### **1978 Château Lafleur-Pétrus (Pomerol)**

The 1978 Château Lafleur-Pétrus is one of the finest Right Bank wines I have tasted from this vintage. The wine offers up a lovely and complex nose of cherries, nutskin, a beautiful base of soil tones, pomegranate, a touch of soy, fresh herb tones and a fine topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with plenty of depth at the core, gentle tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and complex finish. There is

absolutely no sense here of imperfect ripeness and the wine is a very fine, svelte middleweight in its plateau of peak drinkability. 2014-2035+. **92.**

### **1975 Château Canon (served from magnum)**

This most recent magnum of 1975 Canon was generously served by the team at the château after one of the recent *En Primeur* events held there. The wine is a very pretty example of the vintage, but '75 is not quite as good in St. Émilion as it was in neighboring Pomerol, so this wine is in the good, but not great category of Canon vintages. The bouquet offers up a lovely and quite mature blend of roasted cherries, nutty tones, coffee, woodsmoke, heather, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a sound core, melting tannins and lovely focus and grip on the classy finish. Good juice, but in the quantum physics of Canon, great vintages travel at a higher energy level. 2012-2030+. **90.**

### **1975 Château l'Évangile (Pomerol)**

The 1975 vintage of l'Évangile is the greatest wine I have ever tasted from this superb estate and one of the great sleeper legends of the Right Bank in the post-war era. The wine, at age forty, is ironically still a bit on the young side and in need of a bit more bottle age to fully attain its zenith of peak drinkability. This is probably the last "old school" vintage at l'Évangile, as the wine is still cut in the more muscular style of old-fashioned Pomerol (a trait it shares with its neighbor, Château Lafleur in this vintage and probably with no other of the top wines from the commune in '75). The bouquet is absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a blend of blood orange, plum, mulberry, leather, spit-roasted game, chocolate, iron, fresh sage, a stunningly complex base of soil and a topnote of tobacco smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now quite plush on the attack, with a rock solid core of fruit, still a fair bit of firm, chewy and well-integrated tannins to resolve and stunning length and grip on the complex and palate-staining finish. This is a great, great wine that still has decades and decades of life ahead of it! 2018-2050+. **96+.**

### **1971 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)**

The 1971 La Conseillante is an absolutely beautiful example of this elegant vintage and this even more elegant wine. The mature and perfumed nose wafts from the glass in a classic blend of raspberries, woodsmoke, a touch of olive, cigar ash, coffee, gravelly soil tones and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and velvety, with superb complexity and focus, a fine core and a very long, refined and fully resolved finish. This wine has probably been ready to drink for twenty-five years, but it is so beautifully balanced that it will continue to cruise along in its plateau for at least another couple of decades. A superb wine. 2015-2035. **92.**

### **1971 Château Figeac (St. Émilion) served from magnum**

The 1971 Figeac is just a tad riper than the more classic vintages of this era at the estate, and while it is a very, very good bottle of wine (particularly in magnum), I had hoped for just a touch more precision on the palate. The nose is deep, very complex and almost exotic in its ripeness, as it offers up scents of raspberries, cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, summer truffles, iron soil tones, a touch of nutskin and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with beautiful complexity, a very velvety palate impression and a very long, pure and seamless finish. The ripeness here adds just a touch of jamminess on the attack that keeps the score down a bit, but this is a lovely bottle of Figeac for current drinking, and which is

at a particularly good point in magnum. In magnum, it still has decades of life ahead of it. 2010-2050. **92+**.

### **1970 Château Canon (St. Émilion)**

The 1970 vintage at Canon is a great year, and this is probably one of the most overlooked wines in all of Bordeaux in this era. The stunning nose offers up a beautiful constellation of red and black cherries, menthol, coffee, a superbly complex base of chalky soil, a dollop of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, pure and soil-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and outstanding complexity and grip on the very, very long and classy finish. 2015-2050+. **94.**

### **1970 Château Certan de May (Pomerol)**

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 1970 Certan de May since the year 2000, so I was very pleased to see it in the lineup of a horizontal tasting of the vintage a few years back. This was before the salad days had arrived at the property and there was a bit of rusticity to the wines back in this era, and this is certainly the case with the good, but not great 1970. The nose offers up an old-fashioned and slightly rustic blend of roasted plums, a bit of meatiness, woodsmoke, dark soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and still quite solid at the core, with good balance, melted tannins and good length on the fairly straightforward finish. Not a bad wine, but not in the same league as what started to happen here in the 1979 vintage. 2011-2025. **87.**

### **1970 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

It is a good life that has me crossing paths with the 1970 vintage of Figeac with a bit of frequency, as this is one of my favorite vintages from this marvelous estate. This most recent bottle was absolutely singing, offering up a pure and classic nose of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of eucalyptus, gravelly soil tones, orange peel and iron filings. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully resolved, with a good core, superb complexity, still just a whisper of backend tannin and lovely length and grip on the refined and velvety finish. A beautiful Figeac, the likes of which we may never see again. 2016-2035+. **94.**

### **1970 Château Nenin (Pomerol)**

Château Nenin is a good, old school Pomerol producer that made solid wines back in the day, but seems a bit more modern under the ownership these days of Leoville Las Cases. Whether or not more recent vintages will age as well as their 1970 is an open question. The 1970 Nenin is still a good drink with plenty of life in it, offering up a fully mature nose of roasted black cherries, leather, damp soil tones and a touch of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chunky in personality, with a good core, melted tannins and good vitality remaining on the fairly long finish. This is not the most complex of mature Pomerols, but it is a good, honest wine that has aged well and continues to drink with generosity. 2015-2030+. **87.**

### **1970 Château Petit Village (Pomerol)**

The 1970 Petit Village was probably never a great wine, but rather a good, sturdy example of the vintage that offered up early accessibility and honest value. More than forty years on, the wine continues to drink pretty well, wafting from the glass in a mix of roasted plums, black cherries, forest floor, herb tones and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, solid at the core and a bit four-square in personality, with modest complexity, but still very respectable length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The tannins are



long gone here, but the wine shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. A good solid bottle. 2013-2030. **86.**

#### **1970 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol)**

This most recent bottle of the 1970 Trotanoy may well have been the finest I have tasted in the last decade, as the wine was hitting on all cylinders and absolutely beautiful. The bouquet is pure and flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a blaze of black plums, black cherries, a touch of venison, rose hips, chocolate, singed wood, cigar wrapper and gravelly soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really starting to come into its own in terms of elegance and refinement, with a very velvety attack, a rock solid core, melting tannins and great length and grip on the vibrant and magically complex finish. I have always liked the 1970 vintage of Trotanoy, but it would seem that the wine has been aging very slowly and is just now, at age forty-five, truly starting to reach its apogee! A brilliant wine. 2015-2040. **96.**



#### **1967 Château l'Evangile (Pomerol)**

The 1967 Château l'Evangile is starting to get to the far side of its plateau, but it is still holding onto the better part of its structural integrity and is not a bad drink. The bouquet is tertiary, but sound and still vibrant in its mélange of raspberries, cherries, a gentle touch of spiced meats, mocha, nutskins and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, medium-full and complex, with a silky palate impression, modest concentration and sneaky length and grip on the tangy and quite satisfying finish. The acidity here was just starting to show

signs of breaking away from the other structural elements and going volatile, but perhaps it was just this bottle. A good, solid wine that has probably been fully mature for forty years, but is hanging onto life tenaciously and is still quite tasty to drink. 2014-2020+? **87.**

**1967 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol) served from magnum**

I have had the 1967 Trotanoy on several occasions out of regular-sized format, but this was the first magnum I had ever been lucky enough to cross paths with. This is a great wine and probably the wine of the vintage, with only Pétrus and Latour likely to give it a run for its money. The bouquet is so beautiful out of magnum today, jumping from the glass in a blend of plums, black cherries, nutskin, blood orange, a gorgeously complex base of soil tones, black truffles, woodsmoke and a topnote of raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and at its zenith, with great depth at the core, superb length and grip and a very complex, poised and sappy finish. This is a legendary '67 and a wine of enormous presence and breed. 2016-2035+. **94.**

**1966 Château Ausone (decanted 8 hours by accident)**

This particular bottle of '66 Ausone was quite recalcitrant when first opened, with plenty of reduction that demanded extended aeration to shake free from. My friend opened this at his marathon fiftieth birthday celebration and we frankly forgot about the wine for several hours, and by the time we circled back to it, the wine was starting to show a touch of oxidation! You win some, you lose some. In any case, even in this state the wine showed plenty of character, offering up scents of red and black cherries, nutskin, mocha, lovely, chalky soil tones and a topnote of charred wood (as well as a bit of oxidation from our inadvertent extended stay in decanter). On the palate the wine is deep, long, complex and plenty solid at the core, with good acids, still moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. I am sure if we had not forgotten this wine for an extended period of time in decanter it would have been stunning, but even as we found it, the wine was tasty. Happily, a few months later I crossed paths with the wine again! 2014-2040+. **89+?**

**1966 Château Ausone (St. Émilion)**

This bottle was happily drunk about four months after the above bottle and was treated properly and was absolutely singing. The stunning and classically exotic Ausone bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of cherry, pomegranate, menthol, a touch of nutskin, summer truffle, cigar wrapper and a brilliantly complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and magically complex, with precise focus and balance, a sweet core of red fruit, glorious transparency and a very, very long, tangy and beautifully resolved finish. This wine has just a whisper of tannin remaining, but it is the acids and impeccable balance here that will continue to carry this wine far into the future. A great vintage of Ausone. 2014-2040+. **94.**

**1966 Château La Conseillante (Pomerol)**

This particular bottle of '66 La Conseillante had been recorked in 2004 and was not singing. I do not know the reason for this, as it was recorked at the château and should have been pristine, but it was somewhat muddled and lacking in focus. I have had the pleasure to taste the wine on a few occasions in the past and absolutely love the vintage here, so this was a bit disappointing. The bouquet offers up notes of raspberries, coffee, tobacco leaf, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of fresh herbs and a smoky topnote- all classic aromatic elements of mature La Conseillante, but unfocused and swirling, rather than precise. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and seems fairly youthful structurally, with a solid core, a bit of backend tannin and a

long, tangy finish. This wine can be sublime, but this bottle was messed up when it was recorked. I wonder if the Nicolas family would send me a replacement with an original cork?

#### **1966 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

The 1966 Château Figeac is every bit as superb as the 1970, with perhaps not quite the same velvety palate impression today, but with this countered by a bit more vibrancy and bounce on the backend of the palate. The bouquet is *à point* and stunning, offering up scents of black cherries, mocha, nutskin, menthol, a beautifully complex base of gravel, a touch of cumin, cigar smoke and dried eucalyptus in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and shows off plenty of concentration at the core. The finish is long, tangy and focused, with superb complexity and grip, as well as just a whisper of remaining tannin. A thoroughly complete and classy vintage of Figeac. 2013-2040. **94.**

#### **1966 Château Gazin (Pomerol)**

The '66 Gazin is not a great wine, but it is a very good wine that has aged elegantly and offers up a silky middleweight persona and plenty of Pomerol charm. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, pomegranate, chocolate, a touch of mint, a nice base of soil tones and a bit of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and suave on the attack, with a nice core, moderate complexity, melted tannins and really quite nice length and grip. I very much enjoy drinking wines such as this, when time has been able to give them a little something extra that might not have been there at the outset. 2013-2025. **88.**

#### **1964 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

The 1964 Château Figeac is one of the legendary efforts in this great, great Right Bank vintage. At age fifty the wine is drinking superbly well, soaring from the glass in a complex mélange of cherries, cigar ash, summer truffles, a touch of bell pepper, lovely, iron-laced soil tones, gentle herb nuances and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and at its apogee of peak maturity, with a lovely core of sweet fruit, great soil inflection, melting tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, complex and refined finish. Michel Rolland will never, ever make a wine here even remotely as good as the '1964. 2014-2040+. **95.**

#### **1962 Château Canon (served from magnum)**

The 1962 Château Canon out of magnum is a very pretty drink, but even in this larger format, the wine is now getting towards the far side of its plateau and probably sliding into gentle decline. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a pretty and tertiary blend of red and black cherries, coffee, cigar ash, chalky soil tones, heather and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already losing a bit of vigor (or this is the case at least with this particular magnum), with a modest core, melted tannins and good length on the silky and slightly fragile finish. I left the estate wondering if this particular magnum was a bit tired and if there were more vibrant examples of the '62 out there. 2012-2020+. **87+?**

#### **1961 Château l'Arrosée (St. Émilion)**

The 1961 Château l'Arrosée is a beautifully pure, velvety and complex example of the vintage and one of the great sleepers to be found from '61. The gorgeous nose soars from the glass in an *à point* constellation of red and black cherries, menthol, charred wood, a marvelously complex base of soil, curry, coffee, cigar ash and touch of mocha and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and supremely elegant, with an outstanding core

of fruit, melting tannins and great length and grip on the focused and perfectly balanced finish. This is not quite as complex on the palate as it is on that magical nose, but it is a beautiful example of the 1961 vintage with years and years of life still ahead of it. The single finest vintage of Château l'Arrosée I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2014-2040+. **94.**

**1961 Château Bélair (St. Émilion)**

This is the oldest vintage of Château Bélair that I have ever had the pleasure to taste, and it is also the most profound. The deep and hauntingly beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a constellation of blood orange, cherries, a touch of sealing wax, singed tobacco, a glorious base of chalky soil tones, gentle notes of cocoa powder and a topnote of nutskins. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and absolutely rock solid at the core, with a supremely elegant personality, great focus and complexity, still a touch of backend tannin and stunning length and grip on the seamless and truly remarkable finish. Château Bélair's proximity to Château Ausone has never been more evident than in this stunning example of 1961 vintage. One of the great unknown superstars from 1961! 2010-2050. **95.**

**1961 Château Canon (St. Émilion)**

I had not tasted the 1961 Canon since late in 2001, so naturally, after writing my historical feature on the estate back in the summer of 2010, I crossed paths with an absolutely pristine example of the wine in November of that year! Clearly, I underestimated this wine a decade before, as the most recent bottle was absolutely stunning, soaring from the glass in a beautiful blend of dark berries, a hint of blood orange, coffee, cigar ash, a superbly complex base of soil and a touch of sealing wax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gloriously complex, with great focus and balance, lovely mid-palate depth and purity and a very, very long, elegant and *à point* finish that lasts and lasts. A great, great example of the vintage with decades of life still ahead of it! 2010-2050. **96.**

**1961 Château l'Enclos (Pomerol)**

I have not had a lot of older vintages of l'Enclos, but if this 1961 is indicative of the quality of their wines back in this era, I need to cross paths with some other old vintages of this lovely wine. The 1961 l'Enclos is an absolutely classic example of the vintage, offering up a very refined and perfumed mix of black cherries, nutty tones, cigar smoke, dark soil, a touch of game, candle wax and an exotic topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully delineated, with a sweet core of old fruit, lovely complexity, fine focus and still a bit of old-fashioned, Pomerol tannin perking up the long and classy finish. I love old school Pomerol and the 1961 l'Enclos is a stellar example of this genre of great old wines. This has to be one of the great sleepers in the vintage! 2011-2035. **93.**

**1961 Château Figeac (St. Émilion)**

As fortunate as I have been over the course of my wine tasting career, I have only had the good luck to cross paths with the 1961 Figeac on one magical occasion. This is clearly one of the greatest vintages of Figeac that I have ever tasted and the wine remains quite youthful and shows every likelihood of lasting another forty years or more! The utterly profound and vibrant nose delivers a hauntingly elegant mélange of black cherries, damsons, black truffles, mocha, woodsmoke, walnuts, beautiful soil tones and an exotic topnote of mint leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and silky, with a sappy core of fruit, stunning soil inflection, melting tannins and stunning intensity and refinement on the endless and gem-like finish. An utterly profound example of Figeac. 2006-2050. **97.**

### **1961 Château Magdelaine (St. Émilion)**

I had only previously tasted the legendary 1961 Magdelaine out of half bottle, so I was very excited to see a full bottle appear at our Right Bank celebration here in January. The wine is at its absolute apogee and one could not ask for a better synthesis than the inherently refined and soil-driven style of Magdelaine and the twentieth century's most elegant vintage! The bouquet is celestial, wafting from the glass in a very pure and complex blend of red and black cherries, nutskin, brilliant, chalky minerality, raw cocoa, gentle notes of menthol, a very discreet touch of vanillin oak and an exotic topnote that somehow reminds me of celery salt. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and reveling in its purity and focus, with a gorgeous core, stunning soil signature, melted tannins and a very, very long and very complex finish. This is a magical wine of absolutely seamless beauty. To my palate, this is unequivocally one of the greatest wines of the '61 vintage. 2016-2050. **98.**

### **1961 Château Rouget (Pomerol)**

The 1961 Château Rouget is another perfect example of the abundance of relative sleepers that one can still find from this legendary vintage. Sure, 1961 Pétrus or Trotanoy will set you back the price of a small car these days, but one can still drink beautiful, mature Pomerol from this vintage beyond the realm of the best-known estates in the commune. The '61 Rouget offers up a deep, complex and very poised bouquet of black cherries, leather, gentle truffle tones, dark berries, a touch of shoe polish, gravel and a nice touch of old Pomerol nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very elegant, with a good core, excellent focus and balance, melting tannins and a long, complex and very suave finish. This is a lovely wine with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2011-2035. **92.**

### **1959 Château La Pointe (Pomerol)**

I do not have much experience with the La Pointes from this era, but if the stellar 1959 is any indication of the quality of these wines back in this epoch, then I really should get my act together and taste more of these older vintages. The 1959 La Pointe is an absolutely superb example of a top-notch vintage of Pomerol at its apogee, soaring from the glass in a complex blaze of dark berries, woodsmoke, summer truffles, leather, signed tobacco, a touch of espresso, superb soil tones and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very complex, with outstanding, tangy acids, excellent focus and superb mid-palate depth. The finish is very long, complex and poised, with little remaining tannin, but outstanding length and grip. This is as fine a vintage of La Pointe as I have ever had the pleasure to taste. 2014-2030+. **92.**

### **1959 Château Magdelaine (served from magnum) Nicolas Bottling**

I have been fortunate the last two times I have drunk the 1959 Magdelaine to have the wine served out of magnum, with this most recent one a Nicolas bottling. In contrast to the last Nicolas 1959 Trotanoy that I tasted (and alluded to above), this magnum is spot on and an absolutely brilliant example of this legendary *terroir*. The deep and complex nose wafts from the glass in a ripe and pure constellation of black cherries, plums, chocolate, nutskin, roasted *pigeon*, a touch of menthol, glorious soil tones and a bit of charred wood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very velvety in texture, with a plush core of '59 fruit, lovely soil inflection, still a bit of old school tannin and outstanding length and grip on the *à point* and very classy finish. This is a fairly powerful vintage for Magdelaine and an absolute pleasure to drink. 2016-2040. **95.**

### **1959 Château Trotanoy (Pomerol)**

The last bottle of '59 Trotanoy that I tasted was from the Nicolas collection and consequently had been recorked every twenty or twenty-five years while it was in their cellars. I have always loved the Nicolas bottlings, but on this occasion, it seems that this bottle, with an original cork, was even superior. The wine offers up great depth and complexity in its stunning bouquet of plums, black cherries, cocoa, pomegranate, gamebird, dark soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very voluptuous in personality, with a great core of fruit, superb complexity and grip, still a bit of backend tannin and great length on the focused, refined and sappy finish. This is an old school vintage of Trotanoy, with broad shoulders, bottomless depth and the potential to continue cruising on at this magical summit for many decades to come. 2016-2050. **97.**



### **1957 Château Canon (St. Émilion)**

The 1957 Château Canon is a fine old bottle of claret. The bouquet is complex, tertiary and still quite vibrant, offering up scents of roasted cherries, coffee, heather, woodsmoke, iron-like soil tones, a bit of charred wood, cigar ash and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, mature and still quite tangy, with melted tannins, a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, slightly old-fashioned, but energetic and complex finish. I really like this wine, which I had never tasted prior to this bottle at the property in the spring of 2012 *En Primeur* season. The team at Canon always knows how to do things right! 2012-2030. **90.**

### **1949 Château Clos Fourtet (St. Émilion)**

The 1949 Clos Fourtet is a nice old bottle that is just starting to look over the far side of its plateau of maturity and the bit of remaining tannin on the backend of the wine are starting to stick out a bit from the velvety old fruit. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up a complex blend of red berries, coffee, a touch of violet, cigar wrapper and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, elegant and velvety, with good complexity and still very good length on the focused and ever so slightly fading finish. I would drink this up over the relative near-term, but it still has quite a bit of charm. 2012-2020+? **88.**

### **1949 Château Petit Villages (Pomerol)**

The 1949 Château Petit Villages is a lovely example of the vintage that was probably a bit more refined on the palate a decade or two ago, but still quite extant, with a bouquet that remains first rate. The nose is a blend of black cherries, damp earth, woodsmoke, tobacco leaf and just a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and not quite as polished as the nose, with a touch of tariness, still a plump core and a long, meltingly tannic and fairly complex finish. A tasty old bottle. 2011-2025. **89.**

### **1947 Château Rouget (Pomerol)**

The 1947 Château Rouget is a lovely wine that nicely synthesizes the broad-shouldered style of old fashioned Pomerol with the ripe and roasted character of the '47 vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a tertiary blend of chocolate, dark plums, herb tones, tobacco ash, a touch of leather and a good base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, robust and nobly rustic in personality, with a solid core, melted tannin and a long, chunky and still quite vigorous finish. This is not a particularly elegant wine, but it has plenty of depth and good complexity in its countrified style. 2012-2025+. **90.**



## THE MÉO FAMILY'S BEAUTIFUL BOTTLING OF CLOS DE VOUGEOT



I was recently invited to a superb, ten vintage vertical tasting of the Méo family's bottling of Clos de Vougeot, with most of the vintages predating the official establishment of the Domaine Méo-Camuzet in the 1989 vintage. However, though Jean-Nicolas Méo only began officially running the domaine and vinifying the wines here in the 1989 vintage, the family had established the label a few years earlier, as they began to commercialize a bit of their production from their vineyards, which were made in those days by their sharecroppers and then remitted back to the Méo family. Consequently, the Domaine Méo-Camuzet label first began to grace bottles from the family's cellars in the 1983 vintage. The Méo family had pieced together a superb roster of vineyard holdings in the years leading up to the official establishment of Domaine Méo-Camuzet in the 1989 vintage, but for many years, as Jean-Nicolas's father, Jean Méo, had a very successful career outside of the world of wine, the family let out their parcels to three *vignerons* to tend the vines under standard *métayage* agreements which split the production from the vineyards equally between the *vigneron* overseeing the farming and harvesting of the plots and the Méo family. Amongst the three sharecroppers contracted with by the Méo family was of course Henri Mayer, who during the course of his long association with the family (his first parcel was given to him to tend by the Méos in 1945) oversaw the farming of the family's parcels in the vineyards of Murgers in Nuits St. Georges and aux Brûlées, Cros Parantoux and

Richebourg in Vosne-Romanée. Another of the important *métayage* agreements for the Méo family in this pre-domaine era was with Vosne-based *vigneron* Louis Faurois and his two sons, Jean and Jacques, who tended the Méo family's three hectares of vines in the Clos de Vougeot. The remarkable lineup of wines reported on below were all made by the Faurois family during the stretch from 1967 to 1991. The third *métayer* taking care of some of the family's vineyards was Victor Tardy, father of Jean Tardy.

The genesis of today's Domaine Méo-Camuzet stretches back to the nineteenth century and Etienne Camuzet. Monsieur Camuzet was born in 1867 and was a member of national parliament, representing the Côte d'Or for thirty years of his career, from 1903 to 1932, as well as being the Mayor of Vosne-Romanée for much of his professional life. Living in Vosne, he also owned several parcels of vineyards which were farmed by other *vignerons* in the village, as his schedule was more than fully occupied with his governmental responsibilities. During this time, he had the opportunity to purchase a significant portion of the upper section of the Clos Vougeot vineyard (fully twenty hectares of the just over fifty hectares of the Clos were for sale from the Boucquet family at this time), as well as the château that had been built by the Cistercians in the midst of the vineyard. As Jean-Nicolas Méo recounted, his great, great uncle sought to share the purchase of such a large portion of the Clos Vougeot with his neighbors in Vosne and so in 1920, when the twenty hectares of vineyard land and the château were put up for sale, he purchased the château in the vineyard, as well as three hectares of vines that were beautifully situated in the upper reaches of the Clos. While the organization of the purchase was done informally, many of the other families in the village of Vosne-Romanée can trace back their own parcels in the Clos Vougeot to this very same transaction. Amongst these would be the Gros family, the Engels, the Mongeards and the Noëllat family. Graciously, Monsieur Camuzet offered the château to one of his sharecroppers, the Faurois family, to live in during these years, and the family took over the management of his parcels in the Clos de Vougeot vineyard after their purchase in 1920. At that time, Louis Faurois was in charge of the Camuzet vines, and he would pass on his *métayage* agreement for the parcels to his two sons, Jean and Jacques Faurois when he reached retirement age in 1959. Interestingly, Jean-Nicolas Méo related that both Faurois boys were actually born in the Château du Clos de Vougeot and grew up here during the period from 1920 to 1944.

Etienne Camuzet eventually passed away in 1946 and bequeathed his vineyard holdings to his daughter Maria Noirot, who retained the same *métayage* agreements with the *vignerons* her father had contracted with to oversee the farming of the family parcels. By this time, this would have included Henri Jayet and Louis Tardy, in addition to the Faurois family. Monsieur Camuzet had donated the Château du Clos de Vougeot to the *Confrérie de Chevaliers du Tastevin* in 1944 to be used as the center for their events in the Côte d'Or, and which it has done so ever since its refurbishment in the wake of the second world war. Maria Noirot and her husband, Georges Noirot (who was a *négociant* based in Dijon) did not have any children, and when Maria passed away in 1959, she left her vineyard parcels to her nephew, Jean Méo. The Méo family, despite having been settled in Vosne and involved in wine production in some way, shape or form for several generations, was also intellectually-inclined and grape growing was not their primary career track in the years leading up to Jean Méo inheriting the Camuzet vineyard patrimony. In fact, Jean Méo had already attained significant career accomplishments prior to his inheriting the Camuzet vineyards in 1959, as his formal training was in engineering and he had

been invited to join Charles de Gaulle's cabinet in 1958 in Paris and he continued to pursue a very successful career in politics and business in the years to come, balancing stints as head of several large French companies such as Elf, France Soir, Agence Havas and Institut Français du Pétrole, as well as being elected a member of the European Parliament and serving in the Council of Paris. While he was away in Paris following his career path, his father, Gaston Méo back in Vosne oversaw the management of the vineyard parcels, which remained under contract to the same *métayers* that had farmed the plots under Madame Noirot.

Much went on as it had in the past during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, with the *métayers* taking care of the vines and making the wines, the Méo family managing the estate and retaining a small percentage of the production for their family collection and for Jean Méo to share with colleagues and business connections, but with the lion's share of the production still sold off to *négociants*. However, one of the Méo family's *métayers*, Henri Mayer, who was responsible for the largest percentage of the family's vineyard holdings, began earning a very high reputation for his wines during the latter half of the 1970s, as he refined his winemaking philosophy and began to fashion some of the most beautiful red Burgundies to be found in the entire Côte d'Or. As the decade of the 1980s dawned, it became clear that the Méo family had come to a bit of a crossroads and needed to decide how to proceed with their vineyard holdings, as their most important and famous of their sharecroppers, Henri Mayer, would see his *métayage* agreement expire when he reached the age of sixty after the 1988 vintage. Jean Méo and his wife Nicole are the parents of three children, two daughters, Isabelle and Angeline, and a son, Jean-Nicolas. Both Méo daughters were already established in their own careers in the early 1980s, when the family considered starting their own domaine, and the youngest, Jean-Nicolas was the logical choice if they were to become full-time proprietors. Jean Méo had established the corporate structure of Domaine Méo-Camuzet in 1981 and had begun to commercialize a bit of the family's share of production in bottle beginning in the 1983 vintage, so in 1984, he asked his son Jean-Nicolas if he would like to pursue a career running the family domaine in Vosne-Romanée. Jean-Nicolas was twenty at the time and a student at a prestigious business school in Paris. He had no formal preparation for a career as a winegrower at this time, but managed to expand his studies to take a degree in Oenology in conjunction with his business degree, and spent a graduate period studying at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania prior to launching his full-time career in winemaking. His first *stage* as a winemaker was working at Domaine Chandon in Napa Valley in 1988, prior to returning full-time to Domaine Méo-Camuzet to launch the domaine's modern history in 1989. The family took the logical decision to retain Henri Mayer on a consulting basis for the first years of the domaine, creating a sense of continuity with the first wines that had been sold under the domaine's label since 1983 and several of which had been made by Monsieur Mayer. Similarly, Domaine Méo-Camuzet also hired Christian Faurois to manage the farming of the domaine's vineyards, adding to the historical continuity, as two of the families of *métayers* continued to be associated with the domaine in its new phase as an independent producer.

While a few of the vintages of Méo Clos de Vougeot at our tasting were from years after 1989 and the official first vintage of Domaine Méo-Camuzet, the terms of the *métayage* agreements that the Méo family had with the Faurois family, who were in charge of the Méo parcels in the Clos de Vougeot for two generations, dictated that the vines were not returned to the oversight of domaine until the 1993 and 1996 vintages. The reason for this had to do with the

original sharecropping arrangement that the family had executed with Louis Faurois all the way back in 1959, when it had been passed on to his two sons when he retired, with Jacques and Jean Faurois being three years apart in age and their lease on parcels thus expiring at different times. In addition to farming the entirety of the three hectares of Méo vines in Clos Vougeot, the Faurois family also farmed half of the Méo vines in the premier crus of Vosne-Romanée “les Chaumes” and Nuits St. Georges “Boudots”. During their time as Méo family *métayers*, Jean and Jacques Faurois worked the parcels in Clos Vougeot together throughout the growing season, but split up the harvest and each made his own wine from his share of the fruit in Clos Vougeot, so many of the earlier vintages of Clos Vougeot reported on below were actually blended wines, with half of each made by one of the two Faurois brothers. The Faurois’ was not the last of the *métayage* contracts to run out, as Jean Tardy continued to have responsibilities for overseeing the other half of the Méo family’s parcels in les Chaumes and Boudots through the 2007 vintage. Though it is not germane to the lineup of wines we tasted at our vertical, Jean-Nicolas was faced with an interesting situation as the two contracts expired with Jean and Jacques Faurois in the mid-1990s, as after the 1993 vintage the *métayage* expired with Jean Faurois and Jean-Nicolas began to vinify this half of the family’s Clos Vougeot holdings himself, but younger brother, Jacques Faurois, continued to manage and produce the wine from his share of vines through the 1996 vintage. So, the Domaine Méo-Camuzet bottlings of Clos de Vougeot between 1994 and 1996 were a blended wine, half made by Jean-Nicolas and half by Jacques Faurois. 1997 was the very first vintage of Clos Vougeot made entirely by Jean-Nicolas Méo.

I asked Jean-Nicolas Méo about the input the family had on the wines produced by the *métayers* during the decade of the 1980s and he noted that while his father was pursuing his career in Paris, “my grandmother was overseeing the domaine in the early 1980s, but not much had really changed since the 1970s at this point.” However, with the decision to start commercializing more of the wines starting in 1983, the family began to ask for a few more things from their *métayers* in terms of how the wines were handled during the fermentation and which casks the domaine’s share of the production would be delivered in to their cellars in Vosne. Jean-Nicolas noted that his father decided that in the 1983 vintage, one-third of the production would be commercialized under the domaine’s label, with the remaining two-thirds of their share still being sold off to *négociants*. Jean-Nicolas continued, “encouraged by Henri Mayer, my father asked for the family’s share of Clos Vougeot to be raised in one hundred percent new oak” in the 1985 vintage, “but, Henri had not given the full recipe” and the ’85 was raised in very heavily-toasted new barrels. Jean-Nicolas noted that this changed progressively over the next couple of years, so that by the time the 1988 was delivered to the Méo cellars, the barrel treatment was quite similar to what Monsieur Mayer was doing with the Méo vineyards that he was still in charge of producing wines from and the initial style of the Domaine Méo-Camuzet wines was nicely established. Given the further “hands on” approach of the Méo family with their *métayers* as the decade of the 1980s closed, it is not surprising how seamlessly the Clos Vougeot came to fit into the lineup of the domaine-crafted wines after the first “official” vintage of 1989, despite the fact that the Faurois family continued to make a share of the Clos de Vougeot until their own *métayage* agreements expired in 1993 and 1996 respectively.

As noted above, when Etienne Camuzet was first presented with the possibility to purchase vines in the Clos de Vougeot, fully forty percent of the vineyard was for sale by Madame Boucquet and her children (in the wake of her husband’s passing) in 1920, in addition

to the château. These vines were all at the top of the vineyard slope, from the area down below Petits Musigny and Grands Echézeaux and the vines surrounding the château and immediately below the buildings on the slope. While, in my opinion, it is possible to produce outstanding wine from nearly anywhere in the large vineyard of Clos Vougeot, with a meticulous approach, obviously not all of the *terroir* is equal in a vineyard of such expanse and this upper portion is considered as the superior half and all of the very finest parcels are to be found within these twenty hectares of vines at the upper part of the slope. Etienne Camuzet was instrumental in rallying several of his neighbors to purchase the vines for sale in 1920, and as noted above, well-known Vosne proprietors, such as the Lamarche, Noëllat, Mongeard, Engel and Gros families can trace their own ownership in Clos Vougeot to this sale in 1920. Of the three hectares of vines that Etienne Camuzet retained as his portion of the purchase, 2.8 hectares lie in the *lieu à dit* of les Chiours, which is not the best-known parcel in the Clos, but one of the very finest, as it lies immediately below the château and the domaine owns the vast, vast majority of this extremely fine parcel. The only other owners in les Chiours are Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg, who have a slice of the vineyard just to the north of the Méo sector, and Domaine Hudelot-Noëllat, who has the rows of vines immediately to the south. The other twenty *ares* of Méo family vines in the Clos are located in the better-known *lieu à dit* of Grand Maupertui, which lies in the southern half of the vineyard underneath Grands Echézeaux.

Both the *lieux à dits* of les Chiours and Grand Maupertui have relatively little topsoil, particularly by the standards of the Clos de Vougeot, where further down the slope in the direction of the *Route Nationale*, the soil can be quite a bit deeper and rich with clay. The deeper soils tend to produce more robust and broader-shouldered examples of Clos Vougeot, without the refinement of the wines produced from parcels higher up the slope (though of course, the quality of the producer is of paramount importance in this equation.) One should note that when the Cistercians owned the entirety of the Clos and produced three distinct wines from different sectors of the vineyard, their top of the line cuvée hailed from the section where the Méo vines are situated in the present day. Here, in the upper reaches of the vineyard, the topsoil is only forty centimeters in depth and below this lies the fractured limestone mother rock that is also found in nearby Grands Echézeaux and Musigny. This gives the Domaine Méo-Camuzet example of Clos de Vougeot a degree of refinement and raciness that one does not normally associate with the wines of Clos Vougeot, other than in a few of the very finest examples such as those of Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg, and in contemporary vintages, can often lead to the wine being a bit under-appreciated in the star-studded lineup of wines in the Méo cellars. I am certainly a commentator who has not appreciated the Méo-Camuzet example of Clos de Vougeot in the past as much as it so obviously deserves (particularly in the wake of this superb tasting), which was characterized by wines of exemplary breed and complexity and absolute consistency of quality from vintage to vintage! The domaine also has the benefit of old vines in their parcels in the Clos, with fully one-third dating back to Etienne Camuzet's purchase in 1920 and these are now closing in on their one hundredth birthday! Another third of the Méo vines were planted in the 1960s and are now over fifty years of age, and the "young vines" in the domaine's parcels in Clos Vougeot are now properly of age, ranging between twenty and thirty years-old.



*The Château du Clos de Vougeot awash in its verdant sea of vines- les Chiours is on the left edge of the photo.*

I should have mentioned that the outset that I am deeply indebted to Ed Zimmerman, a prominent Burgundy lover, for inviting me to this historic tasting of the Méo family's Clos de Vougeot, as these were all Ed's bottles. I had not had the pleasure to meet Ed prior to our tasting and was honored to be included in this great tasting. We were very fortunate to have Jean-Nicolas Méo join us for the dinner (on his way to the airport for a midnight flight to Paris no less!), so the attendees were well-served with plenty of history as we tasted through what proved to be a truly outstanding lineup of elegant and utterly classic examples of Clos de Vougeot. As I may have intimated above, I was expecting a lineup of very good, but not great examples of this grand cru, which has always had a warm spot in my heart. What I found out quickly was that this was an inaccurate expectation, as the consistency and beauty of all of these wines was truly revelatory and showed that the Méo family's example of Clos de Vougeot is clearly one of the top two or three examples produced in the entire Côte d'Or. Previously, my favorite vintage of the Clos Vougeot bottling from Domaine Méo-Camuzet had been the 1993 vintage, but based on how superb the entire lineup was from 1991 all the way back to 1967 (with a few less renowned vintages also included in the lineup and which showed very, very well!), I am coming around to the idea that I have simply not given younger vintages of this cuvée sufficient bottle age to really appreciate their excellence and have been remiss in not praising the wine more vociferously in the past. The tasting was held at New York's Eleven Madison Park restaurant, with a menu tailored specifically to go with the wines, with a few adventurous pairings, like lobster, included to give the kitchen a bit of a challenge. Many thanks to Ed for so generously inviting me to participate in this historic tasting!



### **1991 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

Though the 1991 vintage was Jean-Nicolas Méo's third year in charge of the family domaine, the Clos Vougeot was still produced by the Faurois brothers of Jean and Jacques, who farmed the parcels under their *mettayage* agreement and made the wines themselves, prior to delivering half of the production to Domaine Méo-Camuzet. The wine is really lovely in 1991 and now into its apogee of peak drinkability, as it offers up a superb bouquet of cherries, red plums, cocoa, a nice touch of fresh herbs, a fine base of soil and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impeccable focus and a long, tangy and utterly seamless finish of grace and charm. Just a lovely bottle at its peak, but with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2016-2040. **93.**

### **1990 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 1990 Clos Vougeot from Domaine Méo-Camuzet is really a fresh and vibrant example of this ripe vintage and the wine is drinking quite nicely, though not with quite the same precision and length as found in the outstanding 1991 version. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of cherries, a touch of red currant, gamebird, forest floor, chocolate and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and quite velvety in texture, with a good core, fine complexity and good, but not great length on the meltingly tannic finish. This is a very pretty 1990 Clos Vougeot, but it is also the weakest of the very, very strong set of wines between 1988 and 1991! 2016-2035. **91.**

### **1989 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 1989 Clos de Vougeot from the very first "official" vintage from Domaine Méo-Camuzet is outstanding, and though this wine was not made under the aegis of Jean-Nicolas and his consultant *extraordinaire*, Henri Mayer, the wine is certainly worthy of the high quality of the rest of the Méo lineup in this year. The bouquet at age twenty-seven is supremely elegant, wafting from the glass in a very classy mix of cherries, red plums, cocoa powder, gamebird, a touch of nutskin, woodsmoke and a deft base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and seamlessly balanced, with lovely focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, pure and refined finish. This seems a touch more new oaky in personality than either the 1991 or 1990 versions, but that may just be my impression on this occasions. Certainly, the wine is impeccably balanced. 2016-2040+. **93.**

### **1988 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

In our vertical of the Méo Clos de Vougeot, the 1988 really stood out for its suave balance and refined integration of its remaining tannins and is really one of the prettiest 1988s that I have tasted in the last few years. The bouquet is quite red fruity in this vintage, wafting from the glass in a bright and fully mature blend of strawberries, cherries, nutskin, coffee, a complex base of soil, a discreet touch of vanillin oak and a nice topnote of spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully transparent in personality, with bright, seamless acids, a fine core, impeccable balance and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. This is really a strong 1988 that is drinking beautifully, but has decades and decades of life still ahead of it. 2016-2040. **93.**

### **1985 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

In contrast to the very classically-styled 1988, the 1985 Méo Clos de Vougeot is quite marked by its smoky, toasty new oak, though this element is perfectly integrated into the other elements of the wine and simply gives it a very different profile than the more classically styled 1988. The wine is at its apogee today and really singing on both the nose and palate, offering up a marvelous bouquet of plums, cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, fresh herb tones, cocoa powder,



spices meats and a lovely base of toasty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, melting tannins, bright acids and excellent length on the complex and velvety finish. Very different stylistically from the '88, but equally fine in its own right. 2016-2040. **94.**

#### **1978 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 1978 Clos Vougeot under the Jean Méo label is simply outstanding and a classic expression of this great red Burgundy vintage. Like so many top '78s, the wine is fully mature and yet still seems quite youthful in its depth and vibrancy of fruit and seems likely to continue to drink with great style for a long, long time to come. The stunning nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, raspberries, gamebird, lovely spice tones, a really refined base of soil, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and tangy, with a marvelous core of fruit, great soil signature, still a touch of suave tannin and exceptional length and grip on the complex and refined finish. In a lineup remarkable for its consistency across the vintages, the 1978 is the finest of all these lovely wines. 2016-2050. **95.**



#### **1976 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

The 1976 Clos de Vougeot from the Méo family is another really excellent wine at its apogee of maturity, with impeccable balance and none of the roasted qualities that one can find in some examples of this vintage. The bouquet is deep, pure and more tertiary in profile than the timeless 1978, delivering a fine, complex constellation of plums, cherries, gamebird, a touch of

nutskin, chocolate, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fairly full-bodied and beautifully resolved, with a nice core, melting tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and very suave finish. This does not have the same bottomless depth of the 1978, but the wine is quite vibrant and pure for its vintage and a great pleasure to drink. 2016-2035. **93.**

**1973 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

I drank a fair number of '73 red Burgundies back in the 1990s, when they offered up pretty, medium-bodied examples of their respective *terroirs* and really were quite tasty in their idiom. But, I had not tasted one for many years prior to this bottle of '73 Clos Vougeot in our vertical tasting, and though the wine was now sliding down the far side of its plateau and in need of drinking up over the near-term, it still was fairly enjoyable. The bouquet is mature and quite autumnal in profile today, offering up scents of dried cherries and red berries, fallen leaves, coffee and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, silky and gently structured, with still some nice intensity of flavor, faded tannins and a fairly short finish. I am sure this was a lovely wine twenty years ago, but it has been riding off into its sunset for many years now and needs drinking up in the next few years. That said, it is still an enjoyable glass of wine, even in its fading last stage. 2016-2023. **83.**

**1970 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

In our remarkable lineup of older vintages of Méo Clos de Vougeot, the 1970 was the only bottle that did not seem totally pristine and I felt it probably was the victim of a failing cork, as there was a bit of maderization here. The nose is quite tertiary and autumnal, with notes of dried red berries, coffee, *sous bois*, bonfires and dried herb tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and slightly oxidative, with still a bit of mid-palate fruit and good length and bounce on the finish. I am sure that there are better bottles of this wine in the Méo cellars (if they still have any of the 1970 left), but this bottle seems to have been undone by a cork at the end of the line. ???

**1967 Clos de Vougeot- Domaine Méo-Camuzet**

In contrast to the failing bottle of the 1970, the 1967 Clos de Vougeot was really singing at our vertical tasting and was one of the really pleasant surprises on this evening. This is another vintage that I drank with some frequency back in the early 1990s, but which I almost never see anymore, as I have to imagine that the vast majority of '67s were drunk up in their generous, middleweight youth. The wine is really lovely on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a lovely mélange of strawberries, cherries, forest floor, nutskin, mustard seed and a discreet topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and still very nicely structured, with fine intensity of flavor, tangy, well-integrated acids, no remaining tannin, but sneaky length and grip on the bright and complex finish. This is not a big wine, but it remains totally pristine and still has plenty of life ahead of it. What a pleasant surprise and a really enjoyable bottle for current drinking! 2016-2035. **88.**

## TAURASI- THE RELATIVELY UNDISCOVERED GEM OF CAMPANIA



The beautiful mountainous region of Campania is home to some of Italy's finest and longest-lived white wines, including Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino, of which I will be writing more about in the coming months. But, my primary goal when I agreed to attend a week long journalistic seminar in Campania at the start of April of this year was to learn more about one of Italy's greatest red wines, Taurasi. Today, Taurasi also happens to be one of Italy's best-kept secrets, as the very great respect the wines earned in the middle of the twentieth century seems to have vanished in the last couple of decades and the wines are not particularly well-known anymore. The grape that is primarily responsible for the long-lived and robust reds of Taurasi is Aglianico, which these days is usually bottled on its own in most examples of Taurasi, though the official DOCG regulations only require that eighty-five percent of the blend be Aglianico, with other permitted grapes being the local Piediroso, as well as Sangiovese and Barbera. However today, almost no one will blend anything into their Aglianico to produce their Taurasi. The vineyards of Taurasi are found in the rolling hills of the Irpinia region of Campania, centered around the ancient town of Taurasi (from which the wine takes its name) and scattered around the volcanic soils of the surrounding mountainsides, generally ranging in altitude from 450 to 750 meters above sea level. Though the Taurasi region is only thirty to forty miles inland from the sea and Naples, the mountains between cut it off from most of the oceanic effect that

one finds in the vineyards along the Amalfi Coast and this can be a very warm growing region in the summer months. Consequently, elevation is one of the keys to quality of Taurasi, as a good spread in diurnal temperatures in these higher elevation vineyards allows the grapes to retain their freshness during the peak heat of summer.

According to Sheldon and Pauline Wasserman, in their fine book, Italy's Noble Red Wines, grape growing in the Taurasi region is ancient, with vine cultivation traced back at least as far as 80 BC (and probably far earlier, with 80 BC being the first written mention), but much of its history in the last couple of centuries was founded around one family winery, Mastroberardino, who were the sole commercial producers of Taurasi up until the early 1990s. The Mastroberardino family officially registered their winery in Campania in 1878, but family history indicates that they were involved in wine production in the region hundreds of years prior to the establishment of their present day winery in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the winery likes to set its date of establishment in the mid-1700s. The family was a huge landowner in the region, with over a hundred hectares of vineyards that they owned outright and nearly that much also contracted to them from smaller farmers in the area. Keep in mind that when the Wassermans were writing their book in the mid-1980s, the entire expanse of vineyard land allowed for the production of Taurasi was only two hundred and twenty-two hectares (now expanded), though the Mastroberardino vineyard land also included some white grape vineyards that were outside of the official limits of Taurasi. But, one gets the idea that for much of the twentieth century, Taurasi and Mastroberardino were virtually synonymous, with the winery responsible for at least ninety percent of all the Taurasi that was bottled in the region through the end of the 1980s.

The most recent generation to run the Mastroberardino family estate during their hegemony in the region were the three brothers, Angelo, Antonio and Walter Mastroberardino, who headed the winery after the death of their father Michele in 1945. Angelo was the oldest of the three brothers by quite some years and he was the head of the winery up until his own passing in 1978, with younger brothers Antonio in charge of the winemaking and Walter in charge of viticulture for the estate during the years when the three brothers ran the property. With Angelo's death in 1978, the two younger brothers did not see things eye to eye, and the disagreements eventually led to a split of the family enterprise into two businesses in 1993, with Antonio continuing to own the family winery in Avellino and retaining the Mastroberardino label for his wines, while younger brother Walter received most of the prime family vineyard land and started his own winery, called Terredora di Paolo. It was also during this period of family strife at Mastroberardino that more of the small grape growers in the region first began to produce wine on their own, rather than simply selling their grapes to the big winery, so the modern era of Taurasi can really be said to date from around or just before the time that Antonio and Walter Mastroberardino went their separate ways (Antonio passed away in 2014 and Mastroberardino family winery is now run by his son Piero). Consequently, while the historic soils of Taurasi date back millennia, the region is really still in the early years of its modern era and many of the producers in the region have only been making wine on their own for the last decade or two.

Mastroberardino put Taurasi on the Italian wine map starting in the post-war era, as their examples of Taurasi from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s really started to gain a foothold for the

wine on the Italian wine scene. There is little doubt that back in these days, Taurasi was a better-known wine than it is today, and many commentators of the time were prone to call Taurasi “the Barolo of the south”, referring to both its quality and the impressive longevity that Taurasi possessed, like its more famous cousin to the north. In this era, Taurasi at Mastroberardino was raised entirely in huge, old Slavonian oak casks, or *botti*, as was also the case in Barolo and Barbaresco in the same era, and the wines were often released with plenty of tannic backbone and took many years of bottle age prior to starting to blossom and show their character. The experimentation with the modern style of aging Barolo and Barbaresco in small, French oak *barriques* and the use of other cellar techniques to try and make the wines more immediately accessible did not really find its reflection in Taurasi in the decade of the 1980s, perhaps because the vast majority of Taurasi was still produced solely by the traditionally-minded estate of Mastroberardino during this decade. Interestingly, though the modern style of Barolo and Barbaresco is an abject failure in my book in terms of the quality of wines it produced, one does have to credit the modernists with at least attracting more international attention to the Piemonte region in their early days and perhaps some of the great popularity of Barolo and Barbaresco today can be credited to the modernist movement of the 1980s.

The first real competitor to Mastroberardino to arrive on the scene in Campania was the large winery of Feudi di San Gregorio, which opened its doors in 1986. The winery was started by two families, the Capaldo and Ercolino families, who had made their fortunes outside of the wine business, and today the estate is run by Antonio Capaldo. From the outset, Feudi di San Gregorio embraced the modern wave of Italian wine, eschewing the classical styles championed for so long by Mastroberardino and consciously making the decision to put a modern spin on the classics of Campania, with grapes being picked at later dates for higher sugars and plenty of new oak embraced across the board for their lineup of wines. I had a chance to visit Feudi during my trip here in March and the white wines, though modern in style, were thoughtfully done and quite impressive within their modernist idiom, but the reds were far less interesting to my palate and rather overripe, high octane and defined by their spit polish veneer of new oak and strident fruit. But, not surprisingly, critics inside and outside of Italy embraced the turn towards the modern style at Feudi from the outset and the winery was a commercial success and soon became another stylistic option for the growing number of new wineries that began to open, as small grape growers decided to try their hand at making and commercializing their own wines. Many of these producers had already been making wine on their own for generations, but this was not on a commercial scale and was chiefly done for family and friends, so it was not until the 1990s dawned that many of them considered expanding their operations to market their own wines.

Today, there are a wide range of producers of top flight Taurasi, with many still adhering to the traditional style of the wine that was championed for so long by Mastroberardino. There are fully seventeen different villages within the Taurasi DOCG, and the vineyards here can range in elevation from as low as three hundred meters above sea level all the way up to seven hundred and fifty meters above sea level, with the higher elevation sites clearly benefiting from cooler nights and longer hang time, so that it is not uncommon for growers in the higher elevation villages such as Montemarano, Castelfranci or Paternopoli to harvest well into November, as the grapes ripen at a nice, slow and even pace in the upper elevations. Further down, one tends to get faster ripening of the grapes and one loses a bit of the precision found in wines higher up in the mountainsides, with more robust characters, higher octanes and probably not the same potential

for either complexity or longevity as the examples from upper elevation vineyards. As the summer days here are hot, it is not uncommon for alcohol levels in Taurasi to range from thirteen percent to fifteen percent and beyond, and needless to say, it is the lower octane wines that generally are the more complex and show greatest potential for long-term cellaring. That said, in my relatively modest experience with Taurasi, I have found that the wine can carry its fourteen percent alcohol levels better than many other wines, as the volcanic soils of Taurasi always lend a fine spine of acidity to the finished wines. The soil is generally a mix of clay, limestone and volcanic elements from nearby Mount Vesuvius, with the fractured mountainside soils providing a perfect environment for the Aglianico grape.

Today, Taurasi seems to me to offer a similar value and opportunity for collectors analogous to Barolo and Barbaresco when I was first starting out in the wine trade back in the 1980s. In those days, the top wines of Piemonte were relatively inexpensive, particularly in comparison to today's overheated prices, and equally important, the very best wines were available in significant quantities and one could cellar as much as one wished of the very best wines (sadly, those days are now long gone for Barolo unless one has seriously deep pockets). The market situation for Taurasi today is quite similar to Barolo in the decade of the 1980s, as supply is good, prices generally quite fair and this is a wine that offers up the same potential for long-term cellaring and great improvement in the bottle as the finest nebbiolo-based wines of the Langhe. Like Barolo, Taurasi needs extended cellaring to really blossom and start to drink with generosity, but in my experience, the wines really start to stir around age fifteen and are truly superb to drink from age twenty onwards, with many offering up at least fifty years of longevity. Structurally, the wines are not dissimilar from Barolo, though the aromatic and flavor profiles of the two wines do not have all that much in common. But, great mature Taurasi is clearly one of Italy's greatest and most complex red wines, and these days, it is hard for me not to argue that there is more great Taurasi being produced for the cellar today than is the case with Brunello di Montalcino for example, as the climate of Campania seems to have better held off some of the adverse effects of global warming than the more open hillsides of Tuscany. Campania is really a fairly isolated region, tucked up in the Apennine Mountains above the Mediterranean coastline, with ample rainfall during the spring and summer months, fairly cool evening temperatures and the fine influence of volcanic soils to keep acids up in the finished wines and this seems to be a formula that has held climate change at bay for the present time.

This is not to say that the very best Taurasi are in the same league today with the very best producers in Barolo and Barbaresco, with the possible exception of Taurasi *maestro* Luigi Tecce, but keep in mind that this region has only really begun its modern day chapter of wine production in the early 1990s and we are still only seeing the tip of the iceberg here. Certainly, Mastroberardino's greatest old vintages, back when they had *carte blanche* with the best grapes and vineyards, rivaled the finest wines of Barolo and Barbaresco, and there is no reason not to believe that once Taurasi comes into its own in its modern guise that there will not be several producers in the region making wines at that same great quality level as the finest old vintages from Mastroberardino. I was very lucky to make my introduction to the wines of Taurasi with one of the greatest wines ever produced by Mastroberardino, their 1968 Riserva, which I have been fortunate to drink on several occasions over the years. It is truly a stunning wine and every bit as exciting as the best Monfortino or Monprivato at their respective apogees, and I truly believe that there are wines now being made at that same level of quality in some cellars in



Taurasi today and there will be more producers in the future that aspire to that level of quality in the future. Today is the opportunity to get in on the ground floor here! To my palate, the most elegant and complete wines produced here are probably those of Luigi Tecce (who really seems to my palate to be the Bruno Giacosa of the region) and Mastroberardino, which though not quite as traditionally-styled as was the case in the '70s and '80s, are still world class wines that will age beautifully. Both of these producers craft wines with a degree of elegance, beautifully synthesized with the depth and power inherent in Taurasi, that sets the standard for the region. However, there are producers such as Donnachiara and Contrade di Taurasi that are already getting very close to this same level and will only continue to improve as they fine tune their techniques as the years go by, as they are both still in their relative infancy as independent Taurasi producers.



*One hundred-plus year-old vines owned by Sandro Lonardo of Contrade di Taurasi.*

The big question for the future of Taurasi is whether the vision of traditionally-based wine styles, that was so successfully championed by Mastroberardino over the course of their long suzerainty of the region, will continue on into the future, or if the more overtly modern producers such as Feudi di San Gregorio will start to attract more adherents to this less interesting creed of wine style. The wineries are at opposite ends of the stylistic spectrum, with each exercising a fairly powerful attraction to smaller winemakers, and it will be interesting to see which way the stylistic pendulum in the region swings as the future unfolds. As the wines of



Mastroberardino are not quite as traditional as they were twenty years ago, it seems likely that a touch more modern influences will creep in at other estates, but if this can remain “just a touch”, rather than a wholesale shift, then it seems probable that the deep roots of old school Taurasi will continue not to be reached by the frosty touch of international wine styles and this will continue to be a region of wines of great individuality and long-term aging potential. And one should really not discount the influence that Luigi Tecce, and his beautifully traditional styled wines, has generated in a relatively short time, which gives a further push in the direction of the old school style of Taurasi. Given that the traditionalists today in Piemonte are so much more commercially successful than the modernists, with many of the latter starting to turn back to the traditions of their own region, it seems likely that there will continue to be plenty of old school producers of Taurasi (hoping to emulate the commercial success of traditionalists in the Langhe) and this region will witness an increase the number of great producers working the soils here in the years to come.

Beyond the realm of Taurasi proper, there are a couple of other DOCs for wines produced from Aglianico in the region of Irpinia, which many of the top producers of Taurasi also produce. These include Irpinia Aglianico, Irpinia Campi Taurasini and wines outside of the DOC that are simply labeled as Aglianico di Campania. Some of these hail from outside of the Taurasi limits, while others are made within the Taurasi boundaries, but are not aged for the requisite three years necessary to be labeled as Taurasi *Normale* (or four years for *Riserva*), such as Luigi Tecce’s brilliant Irpinia Campi Taurasini bottling called Satyricon, which he makes from his younger vines in Taurasi. All of these bottlings from these various denomination are made to drink sooner than the long-lived Taurasi proper and can offer great value from the top producers, as it is pretty hard not to see that such quality-minded estates such as Donnachiara and the like take the same care in the crafting of their Irpinia Aglianico bottling as they do with their various Taurasi cuvées. I tasted some terrific examples during my week in Campania of these various Aglianico-based bottlings and these wines can serve as the perfect introduction to the potential of the Aglianico grape in the fertile, volcanic soils of Campania. Wines from these various DOCs can serve as perfect barometers of whether or not cellaring top vintages of Taurasi would be a personally rewarding experience.

Of the recent vintages that I tasted, the two great years of the last decade for Taurasi seem to be 2008 and 2012. The 2012 vintage saw potential yields reduced by frost in the spring, but this warm growing season was quite even and the grapes ripened to perfection in the long and drawn out year. 2008 was a cooler vintage, but like the vintage in Burgundy, there is a purity and precision to the expression of the underlying *terroir* in many of the wines from this year that is very exciting and promises great things with extended cellaring. 2010 is another very strong vintage for Taurasi, and the top wines from this year may well compete favorably with both 2012 and 2008 in the fullness of time. It was more highly acclaimed out of the blocks than either 2008 or 2012, but only more bottle age will tell if it can match the inherent elegance of these other two years for Taurasi. The 2011 vintage was a more difficult vintage, and this was the one where I saw the most examples of Taurasi during the sit down tastings, as it is the new release coming on the market right now. The vintage was marked by a heat spike in August that sent sugars soaring and consequently, the vintage is a little bit more heterogeneous in style than ’08, ’10 or ’12. Both 2009 and particularly, 2007, were very hot years and the wines often ended up very ripe in profile. There can be some very, very good to outstanding wines from these two vintages-

particularly from producers with vineyards at the higher elevations- but, there are also some big and heady examples of Taurasi to be found in these two vintages that show the signs of *sur maturité* of the very warm growing seasons and are a bit less interesting as a result.

Most of the following wines were tasted during my week in Campania, which fell right after Easter of this year. As this was a week set up for visiting journalists by a public relations company, not all of the best producers were involved in the tastings and subsequent winery visits that filled up this very busy week and my visits were thus dictated by both which producers were participating and which estates' wines I was already familiar with sufficiently to ask if I could make a trip to the winery. As the magical wines of Luigi Tecce were utterly new to me when I arrived in Campania, I did not have an opportunity to visit and taste at his cellars. Upon my return to New York, I reached out to a few importers to augment my tasting notes of some of my favorite producers' wines, so that the report could be a bit more complete. I have broken up this article into two sections, with brief profiles of the Taurasi estates that I visited during this trip appearing first (augmented by the short sections on Mastroberardino and Luigi Tecce, neither of which I had a chance to visit), with the wines tasted from each of these estates listed after short biographical notes on the producers. Following this are the notes on other examples of Taurasi and Aglianico that I sampled during the sit down tastings organized for each morning during my week in Campania. As this was my first visit to Campania and I was just learning about the wines and producers of the region, I did not know to visit everyone who I should have tried to see during my stay here, and consequently this report may well have a few glaring omissions of top producers and their wines that I simply have not crossed paths with yet or were not participating in the week of activities for visiting journalists.

### ***Antico Castello (San Mango sul Calore)***

*Antico Castello is run by the brother and sister team of Francesco and Chiara Romano. This is another relatively new estate, with their first release of Taurasi hailing only from the 2006 vintage. The winery takes its name from an ancient castle that once dominated the landscape of their village of San Mango sul Calore, but which collapsed in the earthquake that struck the region in 1980. The Romanos are committed to classically-styled Taurasi, as they age the wines exclusively in large, oak botti for three years prior to bottling. They produce a Normale and a Riserva bottling (as well as a range of white wines from traditional Campanian varietals) from their nine hectares of vineyards in San Mango sul Calore, where elevations ranging from four hundred to five hundred meters above sea level. The village sits due south of the village of Taurasi and directly west of Paternopoli, about four kilometers from each. The soils here are clay and limestone. The first couple of vintages of Taurasi here were raised in a combination of barrique and tonneaux, but Francesco did not like the influence of the oak in the finished wines and quickly switched over to the traditional botti for the elevage of his reds.*

### **2012 Irpinia Campi Taurasini- Antico Castello**

The 2012 Campi Taurasini from Antico Castello is a good, old school example of Aglianico, wafting from the glass in a complex nose of baked black cherries, *garrigue*, roasted meats, mustard seed and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly structured and chewy, with a good core of fruit, lovely soil signature, very good balance and a long, focused and youthful finish. This is a fine bottle in the making, but it will need five or six years in the cellar to blossom properly. 2021-2045+. **90.**

### **2012 Taurasi- Antico Castello**

This wine had just been assembled in tank, after its three plus years in *botti* and was showing very well at the time of my visit. The bouquet shows excellent potential, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, licorice, sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, dark soils and a nice touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely sappy at the core, with fine focus, chewy, old school tannins and fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This will be a fine example with some bottle age. 2025-2075. **91+**.

### **2010 Taurasi- Antico Castello**

The 2010 Taurasi *normale* from Antico Castello is a very good bottle, but it is a touch riper in profile than the lovely 2012 version and shows just a whisper of backend heat on the palate. The bouquet is a deep and classic blend of black cherries, black pepper, licorice, a bit of road tar, dark soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, chewy and rock solid at the core, with good focus and grip, well-integrated tannins and just a touch of heat poking out on the finish, which keeps its score down a tad. 2022-2060. **89+**.

### **2010 Taurasi “Riserva”- Antico Castello**

The 2010 Taurasi Riserva from the Romano family was bottled in February of 2014 and was showing good potential at the time of my visit, but this is still quite a young wine. The bouquet is deep, ripe and primary, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, dark soil, roasted game, woodsmoke and a touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core of ripe fruit, firm tannins and a long, focused and still very youthful finish. This will be a fine, broad-shouldered and classic bottle of Taurasi in the fullness of time. 2025-2075. **91**.

### **2008 Taurasi- Antico Castello**

The 2008 vintage of Taurasi from Antico Castello is a lovely wine which is just starting to show a bit of development on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of dark berries, hung game, cigar smoke, incipient notes of forest floor and dark soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and chewy, with a fine core, lovely soil signature, ripe tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. A fine bottle of Taurasi in the making. 2022-2060+. **91+**.

### **2007 Taurasi- Antico Castello**

The 2007 Antico Castello Taurasi was one of the early vintages here that was raised in *barrique* and *tonneaux*, with a percentage of the casks new, and the wine is showing some new oak influence on the nose still, as well as some uncovered wood tannins on the finish. The bouquet offer sup scents of black cherries, licorice, game, vanillin oak, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, but without the same mid-palate amplitude of the subsequent vintages raised in *botti*. The tannins are moderate, and other than the touch of wood tannin poking out on the backend, the balance is really quite good here. This is obviously one of the first wines produced here and it is quite good for an early effort, but the level today is moved up a notch. 2020-2040. **88**.

### **Colli di Castelfranci (Alta Valle)**

*Colli di Castelfranci is another of the very young wineries to be found in Campania today, having only been created in 2002. The winery and many of its vineyards are located at the highest elevations of the Taurasi DOCG, in the village of Alta Valle, and the family's Taurasi vineyards here are all found between five hundred and seven hundred meters above sea level, in the coolest sub-region of Taurasi. The Gregorio family runs this lovely, small winery, with the*

young and dynamic Mario Gregorio currently in charge of the direction of the estate. All of their Taurasi bottlings see an extended maceration of ten to fifteen days on the skins and are raised in older Botti for twenty-four months prior to bottling, with an eye towards producing a long-aging, properly-structured example of Taurasi. Their Riserva bottling is produced from the vineyards that immediately surround the winery and are at 690 meters elevation. This was my first experience with the Gregorio family's wines and their Taurasis are very classic examples, with plenty of structure and stuffing and seem likely to age long and evolve well in bottle.



### **2011 Taurasi “Alta Valle”- Colli di Castelfranci**

The 2011 Taurasi *normale* from Colli di Castelfranci is still quite a young wine and was a touch reductive when first opened, but with some air blossoms quite nicely. The bouquet offers up a “cool fruit” blend of dark berries, a touch of black pepper, hung game, dark soil notes mustard seed and hints of the *sous bois* to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and chewy, with an excellent core, firm tannins and a long, nascently complex and still quite primary finish. This is a very strong example of the 2011 vintage and better than I thought it might be, given that the Gregorio family's vines are at higher altitudes and this was a vintage that was harvested quite late, due to the hydric stress in the middle of the growing season. This is likely to be every bit as fine as the 2009 when it is fully mature, despite the much more difficult conditions of the summer of 2011. 2022-2050+. **91+**.

### **2009 Taurasi “Alta Valle”- Colli di Castelfranci**

The 2009 Taurasi “Alta Valle” from Colli di Castelfranci is a fine example in the making, offering up a deep and youthful nose of black cherries, cassis, a bit of road tar, dark soil tones, cigar smoke and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just starting to stir a bit

from behind its structural elements, with a fine core of black fruit, ripe, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. 2021-2050+. **91+**.

**2007 Taurasi “Alta Valle” Riserva- Colli di Castelfranci**

The 2007 Riserva from Colli di Castelfranci is quite ripe, coming in at a full fifteen percent alcohol, but this is the nature of this very hot vintage. Despite the high octane, the wine was showing very well during my visit to the winery at the end of March, offering up a deep and quite sappy nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gentle tariness, coffee grounds, a dollop of botanicals and the first touch of balsamic overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush on the attack and sappy at the core, with an impressive soil signature, fine focus and grip, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Really a fine success, with virtually no signs of heat or *sur maturité*. 2022-2060. **93**.

***Contrade di Taurasi- Cantine Lonardo (Taurasi)***

*Contrade di Taurasi is a fine, small estate that is co-directed by Sandro and Enza Lonardo, with Sandro spending most of his days as a local history teacher and his wife Enza actually handling much of the cellar work. The family’s five hectares of vines originate with Enza’s side of the family, and when her father decided to retire in 1998, he was delighted that Sandro and Enza decided to keep the family wine-growing heritage going and formally established the Contrade di Taurasi label in 2002. The Lonardos have a lovely little cantina for shopping and tasting right in the center of the ancient town of Taurasi, in the cool shade of the fifteen hundred year-old church next door, with their winery located outside of town in the vineyard area. The winery outside of town is flanked by some of their oldest parcels of vines, trained pergola style and now more than one hundred years of age, with the vines looking like small wild trees. These oldest vines are used for the Taurasi Riserva bottling in the years that the Lonardos believe the vintage’s quality is sufficiently high. Like so many of the small producers in Taurasi, Enza’s father made a small bit of wine for himself and friends, but sold the lion’s share of his production off to Mastroberardino for most of his career. Sandro and Enza Lonardo make very classically-styled examples of Taurasi, with plenty of depth and structure and the wines really demand some extended bottle age to show all of their layers of complexity. These days the wines are all fermented with indigenous yeasts and generally raised in five hundred liter larger casks (puncheons), or in botti, with a very tiny percentage of the casks newer oak, as Sandro does not want to taste or smell the oak in his finished wines. However, as the winery is still quite young, some of the earliest vintages were raised in a bit of new oak, such as the 2004, as Sandro did experiment with barriques for a couple of in his earliest vintages, but he did not like the influences of the smaller casks on the finished wines and transitioned quite quickly to larger casks for his élevage.*

*As the family is located in Taurasi, these vineyards are a bit lower in elevation than some of the upper villages, and this translates into wines of real power and structure. In some of the warmest recent years, such as 2007, the wines reached fourteen and a half or fifteen percent alcohol, but most vintages here will be in the traditional thirteen and a half to fourteen percent range. The lineup of Taurasi bottlings here includes a straight Taurasi, the Riserva in top vintages and two single vineyard wines, called “Le Coste” and “Vigne d’Alto”. The Le Coste bottling is from a vineyard that is primarily planted in clay and limestone soils, with vines that range from twenty to forty years of age, whereas the Vigne d’Alto hails from soils that are all volcanic, with plenty of cinders spread about and vines that are all in excess of forty years old.*

*Both of these wines are raised in two and three year-old puncheons, with the Vigne d'Alto receiving a maceration period of forty-five days and the Le Coste bottling thirty days. In contrast, the regular Taurasi will usually macerate for about three weeks. All of the Taurasi bottlings here will typically spend eighteen to twenty-four months aging in their puncheons, prior to being racked into stainless steel tanks for another year of aging prior to bottling. Across the board these are very classically-styled, broad-shouldered examples of Taurasi, and though the winery is relatively new, it is quite clear that their various Taurasi bottlings are very much made for the long haul in the traditional style of the region and I would expect that their wines will start to peak between age fifteen and twenty and keep for several decades beyond this point. This is one of my very favorite producers of Taurasi and it is quite clear that Contrade di Taurasi is already one of the true superstars in the region.*

### **2012 Irpinia Aglianico- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2012 Irpinia Aglianico is the first vintage I have tasted of this bottling from Contrade di Taurasi, and what a beautiful vintage with which to start! The wine offers excellent depth and breed on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of red and black cherries, a touch of curry, gamebirds, just a hint of the chipotles to come, gentle *garrigue* notes and a complex base of volcanic soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and powerful finish. This is every bit as deep and full as the Taurasi bottlings here, and though it will not last as long in bottle, it is a stellar bargain! 2020-2045. **92.**

### **2011 Taurasi “Le Coste”- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2011 Le Coste single vineyard bottling from the Londardos is outstanding on both the nose and palate and will be a terrific wine in the fullness of time. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of baked red and black cherries, hung game, pepper, a fine base of soil (that will not take too many years to get autumnal in profile), cigar ash and a touch of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and quite classically structured, with plenty of stuffing at the sappy core, fine soil signature and a long, nascently complex and ripely tannic finish. This will be a terrific wine, but it will need at least another eight to ten years to truly blossom. 2024-2075. **93.**

### **2011 Taurasi “Vigne d’Alto”- Contrade di Taurasi**

It was interesting to taste the 2011 versions of Le Coste and Vigne d’Alto side by side, as the volcanic soils here have produced a wine that is bigger and meatier in personality. The bouquet is a fine and nascently complex blend of sappy dark berries, roasted venison, black pepper, dark soil tones, cigar ash, espresso, incipient balsamic tones and a nice touch of Alicante-like leafiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and sappy at the core, with beautiful balance, plenty of backend soil drive and a long, ripely tannic and very promising finish. This is another classic, old school example of Taurasi of exceptional potential. 2024-2075. **93.**

### **2010 Taurasi- Contrade di Taurasi**

Sandro Lonardo’s 2010 *Normale* is an utterly classic young Taurasi in the making, offering outstanding depth and nascent complexity, tied to proper structure for the long haul. The bouquet is pure and focused, wafting from the glass in a blend of baked cherries and plums, spit-roasted venison, coffee, incipient notes of *garrigue*, cigar wrapper and volcanic soils that are going to get autumnal fairly briskly. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, ripe tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip



on the still very primary finish. This is classic, old school Taurasi that is going to demand another five to seven years in the cellar to blossom and should easily last fifty years. 2022-2075. **93.**

#### **2009 Taurasi- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2009 *normale* from Sandro and Enza Lonardo is a beautiful wine that handles the ripeness of the vintage really nicely, with depth and the generosity of the vintage coupled to excellent purity and balance. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of black cherries, plums, balsamic tones, licorice, cigar wrapper, lavender and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and very nicely balanced, with some chewy tannin, a fine, fine core, blossoming complexity and a long, focused finish. This is still a few years away from really opening up completely, but it is already approachable with some decanting and will only take three or four more years to reach its plateau of peak drinkability. An impressive 2009 by any stretch of the imagination! 2019-2045+. **91+.**

#### **2009 Taurasi “Le Coste”- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2009 Taurasi “Le Coste” from Contrade di Taurasi is an excellent wine and at age seven is starting to show a bit of its secondary layers of complexity at the present time. The top flight bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cigar smoke, *garrigue*, game, complex soils, a bit of cedar and a nice note of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and superb length on the vibrant and just starting to blossom finish. A superb wine. 2021-2065+. **94.**



*Sandro Lonardo in their very comfortable cantina in the center of the village of Taurasi.*



### **2009 Taurasi “Vigne d’Alto”- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2009 Vigne d’Alto from Sandro and Enza Lonardo is quite a bit different in personality than the Le Coste, with the volcanic soils here lending an exotic element to the nose. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of baked red and black cherries, red curry, gamebirds, *garrigue*, cedar, a touch of cigar wrapper and a great base of volcanic soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and a bit racier than the Le Coste, with a great core of fruit, seamless balance, ripe, beautifully-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the brilliant finish. This is a stunning young bottle of Taurasi! 2023-2075. **94+.**

### **2008 Taurasi “Riserva”- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2008 is a great classic vintage in Taurasi and the Riserva bottling from Sandro and Enza Lonardo is going to be excellent. The bouquet is deep, nascently complex and very promising, as it delivers a fine blend of black cherries, balsamic tones, chocolate, incipient notes of roasted venison, dark soil tones and a nice touch of black licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and grip, ripe, chewy tannins and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced and still quite primary finish. This will be an absolutely superb example with sufficient bottle age! 2023-2060. **93+.**

### **2008 Taurasi “Le Coste”- Contrade di Taurasi**

When first opened, the 2008 Le Coste is a bit reduced and needed some time in decanter to blossom. However, once the wine has a chance to open, it is really a superb wine and a fine, fine example of this cooler, but very refined vintage. The bouquet is a black fruity and very complex constellation of dark berries, cassis, cigar ash, dark soil nuances, balsamic overtones, a touch of road tar, allspice, curry and cedar. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with outstanding depth at the core, excellent focus and grip, tangy acids and great transparency on the very, very long and vibrant finish. There is just a touch more oak influence here, as the puncheons were one year younger in ’08 than ’09, but the wood is perfectly buried in fruit. This is not as deep and powerful as the two 2009 single vineyard bottlings from the Lonardos, but it is every bit as magical! 2021-2070. **94+.**

### **2007 Taurasi- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2007 growing season was one of the hottest in recent memory in the Taurasi area and this wine reached a full fifteen percent alcohol as a result, which is far from typical for the Lonardos’ wines. As Sandro noted, “though the days were very hot in 2007, the nights stayed cool in September and this helped.” It had been a year since I last saw this wine and it remains still quite youthful on the nose, offering up scents of cassis, tobacco leaf, roasted meats, bitter chocolate, cigar ash, a fine base of soil, a touch of *garrigue* and a nice touch of balsamic notes in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and perfectly balanced, with a fine core, fairly modest tannins and a long, smoky and powerful finish that does not show any signs of heat or *sur maturité* on the backend. A fine bottle in the making. 2020-2055. **92.**

### **2007 Taurasi “Le Coste”- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2007 Le Coste from Contrade di Taurasi is another ripe and maturing example of the vintage, which is typical of many of the ‘07s that I tried in preparation for this article. The nose is deep, complex and already quite developed, delivering a fine aromatic constellation of baked black cherries, a bit of road tar, roasted game, coffee grounds and a bit of damp soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, gently chewy and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and blossoming complexity, slightly gritty tannins and a long, ripe finish. The alcohol here is

very well-managed and there is no sign of backend heat, but the torrid vintage has taken a bit of potential elegance away from the Le Coste bottling in '07. A very good bottle, but the volcanic soils of the Vigne d'Alto seem to have done even better in this vintage and I even like the balance of the *normale* a hair better than the Le Coste, though this is the deeper wine. 2018-2045+. **89.**

#### **2007 Taurasi “Vigne d’Alto”- Contrade di Taurasi**

Given the torrid growing season of 2007, it is not surprising that the very fine Vigne d'Alto is showing far more secondary layers of development than either the '08 or '09 single vineyard bottlings from the Lonardos. But, the wine is excellent in its own way, offering up a deep and roasted nose of venison, *garrigue*, cigar wrapper, baked cherries, complex soil tones, cedar, a touch of menthol and a topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is deep, broad-shouldered and plush on the attack, with plenty of stuffing, chewy tannins, good acids and fine complexity and grip on the very long finish. I like the elegance of both the '09 and '08 vintage of single vineyards more than the more powerful profile of this 2007, but this is also a superb wine and differs more in style than overall quality. 2020-2055. **93.**

#### **2004 Taurasi- Contrade di Taurasi**

As noted above, Sandro Lonardo used a bit of new wood for his 2004 and raised the wine entirely in smaller barrels in this vintage. This is a cooler vintage and the wine shows this on both the nose and palate and is still in need of some further bottle age to fully blossom. The bouquet wafts from the glass in an adolescent blend of dark berries, cigar ash, a bit of road tar, licorice, a fine base of soil and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite buttoned up behind its structural elements, with a fine core, ripe, chewy tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and promising finish. With extended air, this shows just a whisper of brett, but this is hardly troubling. 2021-2050+. **92+.**

#### **2001 Taurasi Riserva- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 2001 Taurasi Riserva from Contrade di Taurasi was made from the old, hundred year-old vines that are trained on pergolas, and from what I can tell, there does not seem to be a whole lot of influence from *barriques* in this wine, which I suspect was made in older *botti* prior to Sandro and Enza Lonardo formally launching their winery. The bouquet is deep, complex and now showing mature notes in its mélange of dark berries, cigar ash, roasted game, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones, smoke and road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still rock solid at the core, with a bit of old-fashioned tannin, good acids and fine length and grip on the chewy finish. This is more robust in style than the more recent vintages and is clearly an earlier work in the winemaking legacy of the Lonardos, but it has plenty of depth and stuffing and is a fine example in this slightly more rustic style than the Contrade di Taurasi wines of the last five or six years. 2021-2055. **89+.**

#### **1999 Taurasi- Contrade di Taurasi**

The 1999 was one of the first wines produced by Sandro and Enza Lonardo, who used Enza's father's cellar for the production of the wine, as this was still a few years before they had formally started their own winery. The wine is excellent, but not quite as refined in profile as the wines that they are producing today (though these are examples of “old school” Taurasi, so “refined” is certainly a relative term!) and is still in need of further bottle age to blossom, despite the fact that the wine is already seventeen years of age. The bouquet is deep, complex and quite classic in its mélange of dark berries, dark chocolate, licorice, gentle tariness, cigar ash, a touch of botanicals, hung game and a fine base of soil. With air, some of Taurasi's botanical overtones surface as well on the nose. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and meaty, with a great

core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the structured and well-balanced finish. This still needs a few more years to more fully emerge from behind its structural elements, but it will be tasty in due course. 2020-2050+. **91+**.

### ***Donnachiara (Montefalcione)***

*The estate and modern winery of Donnachiara was only founded in 2005 by the Petitto family and is run by the lovely Ilaria Petitto. Ilaria's family has been vineyard owners in Montefalcione for five generations, but she is the first of her family to run a winery and oversee the production of her own brand of wines. With their very talented oenologist, Angelo Valentino, in charge of the winemaking here, the wines have been outstanding since day one, but the estate is probably best-known today for their outstanding examples of Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino, which are indeed amongst the very finest white wines made in Campania. The Taurasi (and the other Aglianico-based red wine cuvées) here are more the "insider wines" at Donnachiara, despite being as beautifully made as the winery's white wines and they are clearly amongst the finest examples being crafted in the DOCG today. There are two bottlings of Taurasi produced at Donnachiara, a Normale and a Riserva bottling, but in 2012, due to the great potential of the vintage, a second Taurasi Riserva has been labeled in honor of Ilaria's father, Umberto Petitto and the wine will be called "Taurasi di Umberto" in this potentially great vintage. The reds here are a nice combination of classical styling and sensibilities with a touch of the modern, so for example, a bit of new barrique is used for the regular Taurasi bottling, but only older oak barrels for the raising of the Riservas, as Angelo Valentino observes that "we want a bit of oxygen exchange for the Normale, but less for the Riserva, as this is a wine that has to age a long, long time." The Taurasi Normale is bottled after twelve months aging in casks and then held an additional two years in bottle prior to release, with the Riservas spending eighteen months in their older casks before the bottling. Like all Taurasi Riservas, they will not be released until they have spent the requisite four years of aging (between cask and bottle age) in the cellars. All of the Taurasi bottlings here are one hundred percent Aglianico and tend to fall in the fourteen percent alcohol range. In addition to their various Taurasi bottlings, the team at Donnachiara also produces a lovely Aglianico from just outside of the Taurasi zone, which is bottled as Irpinia Aglianico. This cuvée spends from four to six months in cask during its élevage and is crafted to offer more immediate accessibility than their various Taurasi cuvées. The red wines at Donnachiara are of extremely high quality and may well offer the very finest price-quality rapport in the entire region, as they are priced extremely fairly in the context of their outstanding quality. In terms of my hopes for the future in the region itself, I do hope that there will be more producers who follow the path blazed here by Ilaria Petitto and Angelo Valentino, as they seem to offer about as seamlessly beautiful a synthesis of classic and modern as can be found in all of Campania.*

### **2013 Irpinia Aglianico- Donnachiara**

The 2013 Irpinia Aglianico from Donnachiara is an excellent wine and one I would love to find on well-selected wine lists here in New York. The bouquet is deep, pure and wide open in personality, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of dark berries, woodsmoke, a touch of roasted game, espresso, dark soil tones, incipient notes of cigar ash and a nice touch of black pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, focused and beautifully balanced, with a good core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. This is a seriously fine bottle of Aglianico! 2016-2035. **91**.

### **2012 Taurasi di Umberto “Riserva”- Donnachiara**

This wine is going to be a superb example of Taurasi, but it is properly structured and will need some time in the cellar to start to blossom. The bouquet is deep, pure and very, very promising, as it offers up a fine blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, a touch of road tar, gentle balsamic tones, a great base of soil and some of the Taurasi’s botanical signature elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and rock solid at the core, with excellent balance and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long and focused finish. Just add time. 2022-2060+. **93+**.



*Managing Director of Donnachiara, Ilaria Petitto and her beau, outside the family winery in Montefalcione.*

### **2012 Taurasi “Riserva”- Donnachiara**

The 2012 Taurasi Riserva at Donnachiara was still in tank at the time of my late March visit and was destined for bottling in the coming week. This is going to be a great example of Taurasi with sufficient bottle age, as the depth and purity here are exemplary. The bouquet offers up a deep and youthful constellation of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gentle balsamic notes, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and gentle botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and has a gorgeous core of sappy black fruit, with lovely soil signature, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, very precise and ripely tannic and primary finish. This will need more time in the cellar than the 2012 Taurasi di Umberto to fully blossom, but it should prove to be one of the reference point examples from this outstanding vintage. 2027-2075. **95**.

### **2011 Taurasi- Donnachiara**

The 2011 vintage was very late, as hydric stress during mid-summer was not relieved until some rain fell in September and the harvest was not concluded until the middle of November as a result. The wine is quite shut down at the present time and not at all happy to be opened, but with some coaxing eventually offers up an aromatic mix of dark berries, tarry tones, tobacco leaf, dark soil, espresso and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully chewy, with a good core, plenty of tannin and a long, well-balanced and still very primary finish. This is a hard time to be tasting this wine, as it is in the midst of its stormy adolescence, but all of the constituent components are in place here to be a good drink in the fullness of time. 2023-2055. **88-91?**

### **2009 Taurasi- Donnachiara**

In contrast to the hunkered down nature of the 2011, the 2009 *Normale* is really starting to stir nicely on both the nose and palate and the wine's quality is very easy to appreciate, despite its relative youth. The bouquet is deep and fine, offering up scents of black cherries, botanicals, cherry stones, woodsmoke, roasted gamebirds and a nice balsamic touch in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and more youthful on the palate than the lovely nose suggests, with excellent mid-palate depth, ripe, chewy tannins and outstanding length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. A fine, fine Taurasi in the making. 2021-2065. **92.**

### ***Feudi di San Gregorio***

*Founded in 1986, Feudi di San Gregorio is one of the largest and most modern producers in all of Campania. With the establishment of the winery by the Capaldo and Ercolino families, the modern winemaking era in Campania can said to have commenced. I visited this winery during my trip here, simply because I had not tasted any of the wines from Feudi in the past and was curious, despite the fact that their reputation for very modern styles was not the grail I arrived to look for in the verdant rolling hills of the region. I came away from my visit surprised at how much I liked their white wines, where the more modern veneer of the Feudi winemaking style really worked better than I imagined with native varietals such as Greco and Fiano. One of the mantras at Feudi since day one has been to pick a bit later and get a bit more depth of fruit in their wines, which seems to have worked quite well on the white wine side of the ledger, but its utility with Aglianico is not self-evident and I was a bit less impressed by the red wines that I tasted from Feudi. This is not to say that they are not well-made, as everything here is done with attention to detail and serious-minded pursuit of excellence, but the examples of Taurasi that I tasted from Feudi were not my stylistic paradigm for this great red wine (though I likes some far better than others). I will write more about the white wines in my next Campania article in one of the coming newsletters on the region's beautiful white wines, but here, I will simply focus on the red wines that I tasted during my visit or in our large tastings in the mornings prior to heading out for winery visits. The CEO and Executive Winemaker at Feudi is the highly-regarded Pierpaolo Sirch, who spent twenty years as one of the most sought after consultants in the region before taking over the direction of Feudi di San Gregorio on a full-time basis. I should also mention that the welcome at Feudi di San Gregorio was extremely gracious and warm, with the team here fully understanding that I was hobbled by an injured knee during my visit and settling me into one of their libraries, with a fine cup of espresso, music and reading materials, while the remainder of our group headed down to the cellars to see the winemaking facilities. This is a big, professional and very well-financed winery and I would love to see at*

*least a few of their red wine cuvées approached in a completely traditional style- just to see what they could do, as I have little doubt that they would be stellar.*

### **2011 Taurasi- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The Taurasi *normale* from Feudi is probably the closest thing to a traditionally made red wine in the cellars here, as this wine is raised for two years in large, Slavonian oak *botti*, which are five years of age. So the wine does not show the same overtly new oaky personality of some of these other wines and is really quite good. The later harvesting philosophy is a bit in evidence here with the 14.5 percent octane, but this could also simply be a reflection of the August heat spike in the 2011 vintage. The bouquet is deep, ripe and quite classy, offering up scents of sappy black cherries, licorice, a touch of tariness, cigar smoke and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and well-balanced, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a fair bit of chewy tannin perking up the long finish. Good juice and my favorite Feudi red on this trip. 2023-2050. **91.**

### **2011 Feudi Studi Taurasi “Candriano”- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The Feudi Studi line of bottlings are produced in very limited quantities from single vineyards- in this case the Candriano vineyard, which was planted in 1950- and which are bottled in very unique, squat and modern bottles. The winery has produced several different Feudi Studi bottlings of Fiano and Greco, but the 2011 Candriano was their first release of a Taurasi in this line, which yielded two thousand bottles. The wine was aged in a fifty-fifty blend of *barriques* and *tonneaux*, with a fairly generous percentage of new oak and the wine tips the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The bouquet is deep, ripe and modern, offering up scents of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar smoke and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and suave, with a good core, firm, tannins and fine length and grip on the backend. Some of the backend tannins here are from the new wood, but there is probably enough stuffing to absorb them over time. Still, despite this wine carrying its fifteen percent octane fairly well and being finely-crafted in its idiom, it seems to lack soul and is not a wine I would want to own, as the Taurasi *normale* here is so much more complex and interesting. 2021-2040. **87.**

### **2010 Irpinia Aglianico “Serpico”- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The 2010 Irpinia Aglianico “Serpico” from Feudi di San Gregorio is really a very nice version of this grape, with its modern veneer nicely harnessed to allow the varietal personality to take center stage. The bouquet is a complex blend of red and black cherries, *garrigue*, venison, cigar ash, dark soil and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows good mid-palate depth, with a long, focused and chewy finish. Some of the backend tannin here is again derived from the new oak, but the balance should eventually settle in and the fruit absorb the oak tannin fully. A very good modern example and a wine I find far more interesting than the 2011 Feudi Studi Taurasi. 2020-2040. **91.**

### **2009 Taurasi “Piano di Montevergine” Riserva- Feudi di San Gregorio**

The 2009 Piano di Montevergine from Feudi is a lovely, single vineyard bottling of Taurasi Riserva. This is aged in a combination of *barriques* and *tonneaux* for two years and then an additional two years in bottle prior to release. The wine is showing quite well today, wafting from the glass in a blend of baked black cherries, roasted game, cigar ash, autumnal soil tones chipotle peppers and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and solid at the core, with fine balance, chewy, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the suave and classy finish. This shows a nice synthesis of modern and traditional and is quite nicely done in its style. 2020-2050. **92.**

### **Guastaferro (Taurasi)**

*I did not get a chance to visit the Guastaferro family estate during my trip, but their winemaker, Raffaele Guastaferro was kind enough to bring a small vertical of their Taurasi to the hotel for a seminar during our sit down tasting sessions one morning. Raffaele took over for his father in the cellars here starting in the 2011 vintage and has notably refined cellar technique here with each passing vintage. The regular bottling of Taurasi “Primum” used to be aged for one year in “one wine” tonneaux, prior to being racked into older botti to finish the elevage, but this has been changed since 2011, and the wines now spend eighteen months exclusively in older botti prior to being assembled in tank for bottling. Raffaele’s father’s wines were a bit more rustic in style, with heady alcohol and less refinement than the current releases. The family has plenty of old vines to work with and this is an up and coming estate in Taurasi to keep an eye on in the future. The normale here is made from sixty to eighty year-old vines and the Riserva from the oldest vines in the family’s vineyards, which range from one hundred to two hundred years of age!*

### **2012 Irpinia Aglianico “Memini”- Guastaferro**

The 2012 Irpinia Aglianico “Memini” from Guastaferro is produced from eighty year-old vines, which are raised for six months in *botti* and six months in bottle prior to release. This is really a very fine wine, offering up a complex bouquet of backed cherries, new leather, cigar smoke and a fine, complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely chewy, with a good core, fine soil signature and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Good juice that just needs a couple of years to fully blossom. 2018-2035. **89.**

### **2011 Taurasi “Primum”- Guastaferro**

The 2011 Taurasi “Primum” from Guastaferro is far more precise than the Riserva, offering up a complex nose of dark berries, black pepper, roasted venison, cigar ash and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a good core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the focused and youthful finish. I like this better than the riper 2011 Riserva. 2024-2060. **91+.**

### **2011 Taurasi “Primum” Riserva- Guastaferro**

The 2011 “Primum” Riserva from Guastaferro is a good, slightly rustic interpretation of Taurasi. There is some evidence of the summer of 2011’s heat spike here, as the wine is a full fifteen percent octane and shows more dried fruit than fresh on the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of dried black cherries, a touch of prune, hung game, forest floor, cigar ash, pepper and spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and chewy, with a fine core, good balance and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a pretty good, old-fashioned and hearty example of Taurasi, with a touch of *sur maturité* from the year. 2026-2065. **88.**

### **2008 Taurasi “Primum”- Guastaferro**

The 2008 Taurasi “Primum” from Guastaferro is old-fashioned and not quite in the same league as the more recent releases made by Raffaele. The nose is still deep and complex, offering up scents of backed cherries, coffee, hung game, black pepper, cigar ash and incipient notes of chipotle in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a slightly rustic personality, moderate tannins and good length and grip on the complex finish. Not bad at all. 2020-2045. **90.**



### **2007 Taurasi “Primum” Riserva- Guastaferro**

The 2007 Riserva from Guastaferro is a very ripe wine, as the octane reached a full fifteen percent in this torrid summer, but the wine carries its alcohol quite well and does not show any overt signs of heat on the backend today. The nose is ripe and complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, road tar, black pepper, dark soil, cigar wrapper and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely complex, with a good core of fruit, and a long, ripely tannic finish. A good, old-fashioned example of the 2007 vintage that handles its ripeness better than the 2011 Riserva. 2023-2050+. **91.**

### **2006 Taurasi “Primum” Riserva- Guastaferro**

The 2006 Riserva was raised for two years in *tonneaux* by Raffaele’s father, prior to bottling. The wine is again fully fifteen percent alcohol and is ripe and roasted in personality, but it is not hot on the palate. The bouquet is a blend of baked black fruit, roasted venison, black pepper, coffee grounds and autumnal soil elements. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and now quite mature, with modest tannins, a good core and a long, solid and old-fashioned finish. Not bad. 2016-2030. **88.**

### ***Mastroberardino (Atripalda)***

*Mastroberardino is widely heralded for their championing of the traditional style of winemaking in Campania, and there is plenty of validity in the assertion that the wine world of Campania today would not exist as it is without the efforts to protect and cultivate these traditions by Mastroberardino since they first began exporting wines in 1878. The Mastroberardino family has always been very committed to the indigenous grapes and wine styles of Campania throughout the periods of modernization that swept through other wine regions in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s, and if the winery had not been such a bulwark of traditionalism during this era- when so many urged it to change directions and modernize its lineup of wines to include more international grapes varieties- it is quite possible that the viticultural and winemaking landscape of Campania today might resemble the thoroughly modern, international style of Tuscany. Mastroberardino was synonymous with Taurasi for decades and decades, and it was really not until Feudi di San Gregorio opened their doors in 1986 that they had some company at the top of the Campania wine pyramid. It was in this very same year that Mastroberardino began naming their Taurasi “Radici”, which means roots in Italian. Today the Radici bottling from Mastroberardino typically comes from two large vineyards owned by the estate. The first is Mirabella Eclano (elevation 350 to 450 meters above sea level) which was cleared and planted in the mid-1980s- most likely in response to the expectation that more and more of the small farmers who had routinely sold grapes to the estate would start to make their own wines in the years to come. The second is Montemarano (500 to 650 meters in elevation), which has been under cultivation for longer than Mirabella Eclano and has very often been the source for the Taurasi Riserva bottlings that the estate had produced over the years. In the old days, Mastroberardino would age their Taurasi exclusively in old, Slavonian oak botti- three years in these large casks for the Normale and four full years for the Riserva (with some special bottlings going as long as seven years in botti prior to bottling), but this has been reduced in recent years. It is not surprising that the estate has made a few changes in their production of Taurasi that gently nods to the modern world, as the elevage in old Slavonian oak botti exclusively has been altered to now include some barriques and tonneaux for the aging of the wines, and twenty percent of the oak is now new for the Mastroberardino Taurasi bottlings. However, the wines continue to be made with traditionally long maceration*

*periods and are built for long-term aging, and if anything, a very gentle gloss of a more modern style seems to have been added to the Taurasi here, rather than a wholesale shift over to the modern style of wines found, for instance, at Feudi di San Gregorio. The Taurasi bottlings of Mastroberardino that I tasted for this report seem to indicate that this great old winery remains one of the finest in the region and I would love to more fully sample their wines in the near future.*

#### **2009 Taurasi “Radici”- Mastroberardino**

The 2009 Radici from Mastroberardino is a tad riper than the 2008, coming in at fourteen percent on the back label (versus 13.5 percent for the '08) and shows just a touch of the riper side of Taurasi in its superb bouquet of black cherries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, hints of the balsamic notes to follow, a bit of grilled venison and a fairly discreet framing of cedary wood tones from the twenty percent new oak used for this bottling. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and impeccably well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, plenty of soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and classically reserved finish. This will be an excellent bottle of Taurasi with sufficient bottle age, but it will need some time in the cellar to blossom. 2024-2065+. **92+**.

#### **2008 Taurasi “Radici”- Mastroberardino**

The 2008 vintage of Radici from Mastroberardino is an utter classic in the making, with great depth and purity coupled to classic Taurasi structure for long-term cellaring. The bouquet is very complex and vibrant, offering up scents of sappy red and black cherries, spit-roasted gamebird, cigar ash, complex dark soil tones, incipient notes of *garrigue*, a bit of bonfire, menthol, wild fennel and a dollop of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with seamless balance, great focus and grip and a very, very long, nascently complex and ripely tannic finish. This has lovely acidity buried in its structural matrix, which will keep it fresh and loaded with vitality throughout its long, long life. A great young bottle of Taurasi. 2025-2075+. **94+**.

#### **Luigi Tecce (Paternopoli)**

*I did not have a chance to visit Luigi Tecce during my stay in Campania, as I did not know enough about his wines to arrange an appointment prior to my schedule being put together, and once I had tasted a few of Signor Tecce’s superb wines, it was already too late to add another winery visit to my already densely-packed itinerary. However, I will most assuredly put his winery at the top of my list of visits for my next visit to Campania, as his wines are stunningly beautiful. The Tecce family first planted vines in 1930, with Luigi’s grandfather having created a small winery on the family farm five years later in 1935. Luigi took over from his father as head of the five hectare family estate in 1997 and is making absolutely stellar wines. However, Luigi was not groomed to be a winemaker here in Irpinia, as he was following a career in politics in Rome, working on the staff of a member of Parliament, when his father suddenly passed away in 1997 and required Luigi to return to run the family farm and winery. His grandfather passed away in 1982, so there was at least someone to bounce ideas off of for the first few harvests. He began simply bottling a bit of wine for friends and family and did not start to earnestly commercialize his wines until the 2003 vintage.*



*Signor Tecce has vineyards in three of the higher elevation villages in the Taurasi sector, Paternopoli, Montemarano and Castelfranci, with plenty of old vines that grow in the region like twisted, small trees under their pergolas. The vineyards sit at an elevation of 550 meters above sea level. He produces two wines, an Aglianico from his younger vines in the Taurasi limits, which is classified as Irpinia Campi Taurasini and which he commercializes under the name of “Satyricon” and his Taurasi, which carries the name of “Poliphemo” and is produced from his now eighty year-old vines that were first planted by his grandfather back in the 1930s. Of the five hectares of vines that he owns, fully two and a half hectares were replanted in 2000, so there is not a lot of production of either wine today. The Irpinia bottling of Satyricon is fermented in stainless steel tanks, macerates for sixty days on the skins and then aged for twelve months in a combination of older casks, tonneaux and botti, prior to bottling. In contrast, his Taurasi “Poliphemo” is fermented in old chestnut tanks, spends forty days macerating and is then aged for*

*twelve months in older tonneaux, before being racked into botti for an additional twelve months of elevage prior to bottling. The wines are made with indigenous yeasts and are bottled unfiltered. I took one taste of my first Tecce wine on my second evening in Campania and thought here is the Bruno Giacosa of Taurasi! Presently, Signor Tecce produces about three thousand bottles of each of his cuvées. While his wines are not particularly well known today outside of Campania, Luigi Tecce is clearly amongst the very finest, if not the finest, winemaker in Taurasi today and he will be a superstar in the very near future! I cannot urge readers strongly enough to search out some of Signor Tecce’s wines soon, as these are going to be hard to find and far more expensive in the years to come. The comparison to Bruno Giacosa is not far-fetched, I assure you! (The superb photo of Luigi Tecce is courtesy of Tom Hyland, one of America’s foremost experts on Italian wines, as well as a superb photographer. Tom’s new book on Piemonte is due on the shelves in the next several weeks and is highly recommended. Photo copyright 2013 by Tom Hyland.)*

### **2013 Irpinia Campi Taurasini “Satyricon”- Luigi Tecce**

The 2013 Satyricon bottling of Aglianico from Luigi Tecce is as fine as most top examples of Taurasi, but with its younger vine constitution, requires less time to fully blossom than his Poliphemo bottling of Taurasi. The 2013 Satyricon offers up a superb nose of black

cherries, roasted meats, a touch of *garrigue*, an excellent base of soil, a hint of chipotle pepper and a nice touch of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, gently chewy tannins and a long, perfectly balanced and youthful finish. Lovely juice. 2021-2050. **93.**

#### **2012 Taurasi “Poliphemo”- Luigi Tecce**

The 2012 Poliphemo is a brilliant young Taurasi in the making, offering up stunning purity and precision in its complex nose of red and black cherries, roasted game, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of Cornas-like medicinal tones, gentle tariness, lavender and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and focused, with a great core of fruit, stellar soil signature, ripe, perfectly integrated tannins and absolutely superb length and grip on the focused and impeccably balanced finish. This is a great young wine by any measure! 2022-2065+. **95.**

#### **2008 Taurasi “Poliphemo”- Luigi Tecce**

The 2008 vintage of Poliphemo from Luigi Tecce is not too far away from primetime drinking, but could still do with at least a couple more years in the cellar to allow the tannins to more fully fall away. The bouquet is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, cigar wrapper, a complex base of soil and nice, *garrigue*-like spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a sappy core, tangy acids and a very long, very complex and modestly tannic finish. The inherent elegance of Luigi Tecce’s wines is a perfect foil to the superb 2008 vintage in Taurasi! 2018-2045+. **94.**

#### ***Additional Irpinia Aglianico and Campi Taurasini Tasted***

*The variations on regulations for these wines is what determines whether or not they include the name of the grape, Aglianico, on the label. Wines labeled as Irpinia can be red or white and made from a variety of grapes native to Campania, so those made from Aglianico will have this clearly stated on the label. In contrast, Campi Taurasini is a DOC wine that must be made from Aglianico exclusively, so it is not printed on the label. This wine hails from vineyards within the Taurasi boundaries, but which is not aged the requisite three years to be declared as Taurasi. Effectively, top estates use this DOC for their younger vines, which they make to be accessible earlier and the wines can be terrific in quality and great values.*

#### **2013 Irpinia Aglianico- Cantina Riccio**

The 2013 Irpinia Aglianico from Cantina Riccio is a good bottle in the making, offering up a fine nose of black cherries, dark soil tones, roasted game, a touch of chipotle and black pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and peppery like a young Cornas, with a good core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the meaty finish. This is not the most refined example, but it has stuffing and merit in its slightly more rustic guise. 2016-2030+. **89.**

#### **2013 Irpinia Aglianico- “Cantine Storiche”- Di Marzo**

The 2013 Cantine Storiche” bottling of Aglianico from Di Marzo is a very nice bottle for near-term drinking, without the same depth as the top examples of Irpinia Aglianico from superior vintages, but with balance, complexity and nice style in a more medium-bodied format. The bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, dried dark berries, roasted game, bonfire and a touch of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, medium-full and nicely balanced, with respectable (but not great) depth at the core, moderate tannins and sneaky

length and grip on the complex finish. I like this very much for what it is- a well-made everyday drinker for the next seven or eight years. 2016-2023. **88.**

**2012 Irpinia Campi Taurasini- Fonzone**

The 2012 Campi Taurasini from Fonzone is a lovely wine that really shows the high quality of this vintage. The bouquet is deep, classically Aglianico in personality and complex, offering up scents of red and black cherries, roasted venison, poblano peppers, *garrigue*, hints of autumn soil and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, good focus and grip and a long, quite impressively refined finish. This has the elegance of 2012 written all over it and is a fine value! 2020-2040. **90.**

**2012 Irpinia Campi Taurasini- Villa Raiano**

The 2012 Campi Taurasini from Villa Raiano has lovely raw materials, but these have been wasted under a sloppy dose of new wood. The bouquet is deep and ripe, offering up a mix of baked black cherries, venison, *garrigue*, cigar box and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, with a good core, but a dried out backend from too much new oak and uncovered wood tannins. A pity. 2016-2025? **80.**

**2011 Irpinia Campi Taurasini- I Favati**

The 2011 Campi Taurasini from I Favati is another wine with very good raw materials, but not a particularly sophisticated touch with the new wood. The bouquet is ripe and sappy, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, venison, a good base of soil, spice tones and plenty of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows plenty of mid-palate depth, with good focus and length, but a bit of backend rigidity from its time in *barriques* on the finish. There is good stuffing here and a chance that the fruit will simply eat up the wood tannins with a bit more bottle age, in which case the score will seem conservative. But, this would be really good wine with little or no new oak. 2021-2045. **87+?**

**2010 Campi Taurasini “Cretarossa”- I Favati**

The 2010 Campi Taurasini “Cretarossa ” from I Favati is a lovely wine on the nose, but shows just a bit of backend rigidity on the palate from its serving of new oak, which keeps its score down a bit. The bouquet is a fine blend of black cherries, bonfire, cigar wrapper, a touch of chipotle and spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the sturdy finish. This would have been outstanding with a touch lighter hand with the oak. 2020-2040. **89.**

***Additional Taurasi Producers Tasted***

**2011 Taurasi “Nero Né”- Il Cancelliere**

The 2011 Taurasi “Nero Né” from Il Cancelliere is a fine example of this vintage, with a touch of *barrique* very nicely handled in the cellars. The meaty nose offers up a complex blend of dark berries, roasted venison, pepper, cigar box, dark soil tones, balsamic overtones and *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, ripe tannins and lovely focus and grip on the youthful and well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2022-2050+. **91+.**

**2011 Taurasi “Opera Mia”- Tenuta Cavalier Pepe**

The 2011 Taurasi “Opera Mia” from Tenuta Cavalier Pepe is a good example of the vintage, but it does show some ill effects from the heat spike in August of this year, as the wine has a bit more pruniness to its fruit component in the mid-palate than what is found in the 2010 version. The bouquet is deep and nicely meaty in profile, offering up scents of baked red and black cherries, spiced meats, bonfire, a touch of chipotle, autumnal soil tones and a dollop of

upper register botanicals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, quite ripe and reasonably well-balanced, with chewy tannins and good length and grip on the finish. Not a bad wine, but the 2010 is stronger. 2021-2050. **88.**



**2010 Taurasi “Principe Lagonessa”- Amarano**

The 2010 Taurasi “Principe Lagonessa” from Amarano shows the ripe side of the vintage, but has depth, balance and focus and will be very good with a bit more bottle age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a buxom blend of baked black fruit, venison, cigar ash, chipotle peppers, autumnal soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with plenty of stuffing, ripe tannins and good focus and grip on the long finish. This will not need too many years to really start to drink well, but should age nicely for at least a couple of decades. Good juice. 2020-2045+. **91.**

**2010 Taurasi “Borgodangelo Riserva”- Borgodangelo**

Borgodangelo’s 2010 Taurasi Riserva is a fine and quite classic example of this strong vintage. The wine wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of baked black cherries, grilled meats, cigar wrapper, a fine base of dark soil tones and hints of the chipotles to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe tannins, very good balance and a long, youthful and chewy finish. Good juice in the making. 2022-2050. **90+.**



### **2010 Taurasi- Tenute di Altavilla di Villa Matilde**

The 2010 Taurasi from Tenute di Altavilla di Villa Matilde is fairly elegant out of the blocks for a 2010 Taurasi, offering up a quite refined nose of dark berries, black pepper, roasted meats, cigar wrapper and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively suave on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, very good soil signature, well-integrated tannins and lovely length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is not the most powerful example of Taurasi one is going to find, but there is depth and intensity here to go along with lovely elegance and this is a fine bottle. 2024-2060. **91.**

### **2010 Taurasi “Opera Mia”- Tenuta Cavalier Pepe**

The 2010 Taurasi “Opera Mia” from Tenuta Cavalier Pepe is a ripe and powerful wine, but still balanced and will be a good wine with some requisite time in the cellar. The bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, hung game, coffee, cigar ash, the first vestiges of forest floor and a topnote of poblano peppers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and chewy, with a fine core, good focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and youthful finish. This will be a good bottle with another eight to ten years’ worth of bottle age. 2024-2060. **90+.**

### **2010 Taurasi “Issàra”- Le Marca Cantine di Tufo**

The 2010 Taurasi “Issàra” from Le Marca Cantine di Tufo is quite a ripe and slightly rustic example of the vintage. The nose offers up scents of dried dark berries, hung game, roasted peppers, road tar and dark soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, chewy and shows good mid-palate depth, with broad shoulders, not a whole lot of elegance, but good length and grip on the peppery finish. This is not bad in its rustic style, but it is more middle of the pack qualitatively than head of the class. 2025-2065. **87.**

### **2009 Taurasi “La Loggia del Cavaliere” Riserva- Tenuta Cavalier Pepe**

The 2009 “La Loggia del Cavaliere” Riserva from Tenuta Cavalier Pepe is a broad-shouldered and old school example of Taurasi, with a bit of a rustic personality, but no shortage of depth or complexity. The nose delivers scents of baked black fruit, roasted venison, autumnal soil tones, cigar ash and chipotles in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, broad-shouldered and displays plenty of mid-palate depth, with good soil signature, chewy, old school tannins and good length and grip on the slightly chunky, but honest finish. Not bad at all in a more robust and less refined persona. 2024-2055. **88.**

### **2009 Taurasi- Borgodangelo**

The 2009 Taurasi from Borgodangelo is a big and ripe wine on both the nose and palate, with good complexity, but not quite the breed of the top examples of the vintage. The complex nose offers up a mélange of dried black cherries, forest floor, prunes, venison, cigar ash and lovely, *garrigue* spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and focused, with good balance, a rock solid core, chewy tannins and very good length and grip on the focused finish. A good wine in that riper style. 2020-2040. **89.**

### **2007 Taurasi- Perillo**

The 2007 Taurasi from Perillo is a very strong example of this torrid vintage, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of baked black cherries, cigar ash, gentle balsamic tones, a complex base of autumnal soil tones, poblano peppers, a touch of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with still a bit of ripe tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and broad-shouldered finish. This is already approachable and should keep nicely for several more decades. Good juice. 2016-2040. **91.**



## CHÂTEAU DE BEAUCASTEL'S LUXURY CUVÉE HOMMAGE À JACQUES PERRIN



When I wrote my historical feature on Château de Beaucastel back in November of 2008, I focused on the regular bottling of this estate's great wines, as that is what I have normally drunk and cellared from Beaucastel since my very earliest days in the wine trade. However, as readers will already know, since the 1989 vintage, Château de Beaucastel has also produced a special, luxury cuvée bottling called *Hommage à Jacques Perrin*. The wine is named after one of the most influential members of the Perrin family in the long history of the domaine. Jacques Perrin succeeded his father, Pierre, as the director of Château de Beaucastel in 1946 and was one of the seminal figures in the region of Châteauneuf du Pape during the twentieth century. He was universally respected by everyone in the surrounding area and a man of great energy and talent. During his tenure at the head of the estate, he oversaw the creation of Château de Beaucastel as we know it today, with the large estate more fully planted with vineyards and the bottling taking its place amongst the two or three most highly-regarded wines of the entire appellation. Jacques Perrin was a huge fan of the mourvèdre grape variety for the blend at Beaucastel, and he greatly expanded the percentage of this grape planted in the vineyards of the estate, so that today it encompasses fully thirty hectares of the *vignobles* at Beaucastel (out of seventy hectares that are planted at any one time in the domaine's vineyards within the Châteauneuf appellation). This

high percentage of mourvèdre in the blend is one of the defining elements of both of the regular Beaucastel bottling, as well as the special luxury cuvée of “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”, as both of these wines contain the highest percentage of the grape of any wines in the Châteauneuf du Pape appellation. The Hommage is actually also a tribute to the potential of the Mourvèdre grape in the southern Rhône, as it is produced each year with a much higher percentage of this grape in the blend than the regular bottling at the domaine.

Jacques Perrin retired with the 1977 vintage and passed away in 1978, after more than thirty years at the helm of Château de Beaucastel, and passed on the reigns of the estate to his two sons, François and Jean-Pierre. When the extraordinary Châteauneuf du Pape vintage of 1989 came along, the Perrin brothers sought to create a special bottling at the estate and named it in memory of their father, Jacques. It began its life as a luxury cuvée that was only to be produced in the greatest of vintages, which of course the first two years of 1989 and 1990 certainly qualified for when they were released. However, the wine proved to be so popular in the marketplace that there must surely have been some commercial pressure on the domaine to produce an Hommage bottling a bit more often, and one has seen an acceleration in the number of vintages declared worthy of Hommage à Jacques Perrin bottlings in recent times. The wine is made in very limited quantities of between three hundred and fifty and four hundred and twenty-five cases in the vintages where it is produced, being made from a selection of the very oldest Mourvèdre vines on the property, along with percentages of old vine Grenache, Cunoise and Syrah. The Mourvèdre vines range from sixty-five to ninety years of age, making the Hommage à Jacques Perrin truly an old vine bottling. The wine is fermented exclusively in temperature-controlled cement tanks during the start of its *elevage*, then transferred to oak *foudre* for an extended cellar aging regimen that will typically run twenty-four months out from the harvest prior to its being bottled. Though the wine continues to be raised in *foudre*, I find a bit more newer oak influence in more recent vintages and wonder if the *foudre* used today for the wine’s *elevage* is newer than was the case back in 1989 or 1990.

Typically, the *cépages* of the Hommage à Jacques Perrin bottling will be sixty percent Mourvèdre, twenty percent Grenache and ten percent each of Cunoise and Syrah. However, occasionally these percentages can shift, depending on how well each grape variety excels in a given vintage. This occurred in the 1998 vintage, where the grenache was particularly strong, so that the wine includes much more grenache than in other vintages. The grapes that are destined to become the luxury bottling of Hommage are all fermented separately in their temperature controlled cement tanks and then aged on their own up through the end of the malolactic fermentation, with the blending taking place prior to the cuvée’s *elevage* in *foudre*. Every vintage of Hommage has been completely destemmed prior to fermentation and like all Beaucastel wines, it is fermented solely with indigenous yeasts. One of the cellar practices that has been typical at Beaucastel over the years for their red wines has been a technique known as *vinification à chaud*, where the grapes are heated up briefly to a high temperature as they arrive at the *chais* from the vineyards at harvest time, and then immediately cooled down prior to pressing. This is considered a technique to help extraction and prevent oxidation in the grapes, as well as helping to set the color in the resulting wine and is used exclusively at Château de Beaucastel, as the Perrin family are pioneers of this technique (which was perfected under the aegis of Jacques Perrin). When I asked Marc Perrin if the grapes for the Hommage underwent their *vinification à chaud* technique prior to crushing and the start of fermentation, he responded

“not really- this is a process we use mostly for grenache and not in every vintage.” Like all of the wines at the estate, it is bottled unfiltered and typically, there will be a single *foudre* of Hommage à Jacques Perrin produced in the years where the quality is deemed sufficiently high by the Perrin family.

One of the things that was very, very apparent in our vertical tasting was that the octane level of this wine has moved up dramatically since the first vintage of 1989, with the most recent vintages of 2010 and 2009 reporting fifteen percent alcohol on the labels and perhaps even a touch higher than this stated level. The 2007 Hommage claims 15.5 percent alcohol on the label! Contrast this with 13.5 percent for the 1998, thirteen percent for the 1995 and 12.5 percent for the first vintage of 1989- at least as far as the accuracy of the labels can be counted upon. The higher ripeness levels of the younger wines are very much apparent as one works back through the most recent vintages towards the iconic 1989 Hommage, and the increase in alcohol for this cuvée has not been a positive trend to my palate by any stretch of the imagination. Based on our vertical tasting, there seems to have been three or four distinct periods of evolution for this bottling, with the first three years of 1989, 1990 and 1994 truly exceptional wines that are a distinct step up from the quality of the regular bottling at Château de Beaucastel. As the decade of the 1990s progressed, the style of the wine still remains fairly classic in profile, with the possible exception of the very, very ripe year of 1998 (which includes more grenache in the blend), but I do not see the same qualitative distance between the regular cuvée and the Hommage bottling (though I should note that I did not taste the Hommage and regular Beaucastel side by side from any of these vintages and perhaps my impressions would change if I had done so). These vintages of Hommage are chewy, structured and built for the long haul and they may show more breed and complexity once they are fully mature. The early vintages of the 2000s are also fairly classical in balance, coming in under fourteen percent alcohol, but the fact that there are Hommage bottlings in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2003 is a clear indication that this cuvée is no longer only being produced solely in great vintages.

To my palate, the real transition away from the original style of Hommage à Jacques Perrin occurs in the 2005 vintage, with a riper, simpler and more overtly stylized and modern gloss descending over the wine, not to mention the influence of far more alcohol. From 2005 forwards, the wine is decidedly more of a modern, international luxury cuvée, with the lions’ share of its personality hailing from a combination of pumped up, overripe fruit and much of the nuance and inherent soil complexity of Beaucastel sacrificed along the way. The wines are uniformly hot on the palate, fat and youthfully simple in terms of complexity and a far cry from the earliest vintages that made the bottling’s reputation. The 2005 is the transition wine here, with the alcohol up over 14.5 percent, but still holding some semblance of the past in its aromatic and flavor profile, but from 2007 forwards, these wines are really not very interesting to my palate and egregiously hot and jammy. I am not sure if there was a philosophical sea change with the 2007 vintage (or if this is just a reflection of the heavy footprint of global warming on the region), but the youngest vintages of Hommage are really too heady in style to offer any enjoyment to me, who has cut his teeth on the vintages of the 1970s and 1980s at Château de Beaucastel. It is not that the wines are total disasters, but they are simple, alcoholic, modern wines of little personality and less inherent complexity than what was found in the earliest vintages. I really have no comprehension of why the style has changed so dramatically and to such adverse effect, and even less understanding of why I had not heard of this from other

commentators who taste the wine with regularity each time it is released. Given my lifelong appreciation for the wines of Château de Beaucastel, I was really expecting more from the most recent vintages of Hommage à Jacques Perrin.

#### **2010 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 2010 vintage of the Hommage à Jacques Perrin is a very ripe wine and seems like it could be even a tad higher in octane than the fifteen percent stated on the label. The bouquet is very ripe and jammy, offering up a simply mélange of blackberries, woodsmoke, chocolate and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a bit of hollowness at the core, supple tannins and a notably short, hot finish. This is fat and glossy, but lacks complexity, length and grip and is really quite a surprise in quality, given the usual very high standards of the Perrin family. It will drink okay with a few more years' worth of bottle age and probably keep for a couple of decades, but it is not a very inspiring bottle. 2020-2035? **85.**

#### **2009 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 2009 Hommage from Château de Beaucastel is also a full fifteen percent octane, but this seems to have far more depth and gravitas than the rather specious and short 2010 rendition. The bouquet offers up a ripe nose of marinated black cherries, blackberries, a bit of tree bark, hung game and plenty of smoky new oak influence. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and less overtly hot on the backend than the 2010, with a good, but not great core, moderate tannins and a fairly long, heady finish. This is okay, but again, given the cuvée's reputation and price tag, I would expect far more than this wine will ever deliver. 2019-2035+. **87.**

#### **2007 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

Of all the vintages of Hommage à Jacques Perrin in our vertical, the 2007 claimed the highest alcohol level, as this is listed at a full 15.5 percent on the back label. The nose is more complex than either the 2009 or 2010 versions, but perhaps this is just a reflection of a bit of bottle age. The bouquet is a blend of smoky oak, cassis, leather, tree bark and chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, plush and very fruit-driven in personality, with a good core, little remaining tannins and a long, fairly hot finish. This is another solid effort, but for a Beaucastel luxury cuvée, the quality is really not remotely close to what it should be- if one bases their expectations of Hommage on vintages like '89 and '90. This seems likely not to last more than a decade in bottle, as it is already quite top heavy. 2016-2025? **87.**

#### **2005 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 2005 vintage of Hommage à Jacques Perrin is also plenty ripe, tipping the scales at 14.5 percent alcohol, but viewed within the context of subsequent vintages, this is downright classic in profile. The bouquet offers up more freshness in its blend of cassis, balsamic tones, pepper, tree bark, smoke and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and nicely structured (in notable contradistinction to the jammy 2007 through 2010 versions), with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins, a bit of uncovered alcohol on the backend, but good length and grip on the chewy finish. This needs several more years to start to drink with a bit more generosity, but it has good constituent components and should eventually be a good, solid, albeit, quite ripe vintage of Hommage. 2021-2040+. **90.**

#### **2004 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

Interestingly, the 2004 Hommage à Jacques Perrin is another full point lower in alcohol than the 2005, coming in at 13.5 percent octane. The wine is a step up in complexity on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a still youthful blend of cassis, leather, licorice, tree bark, dark soil tones, cedar and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and ripely tannic, with a fine core, good structure and the first vintage in this series that shows some serious soil signature on the long finish. Good juice and much more in keeping with the high reputation of this bottling. 2022-2040+. **93.**

**2003 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

Given the mantra at the domaine that the Hommage à Jacques Perrin is only made in the finest vintages, I hardly expected to encounter a 2003 version, but the wine is really not bad at all and is now into its apogee. This is surprisingly low in octane for the vintage, coming in at the same 13.5 percent as the 2001 and 2004 iterations. The bouquet is really quite fine, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of dark berries, new leather, tree bark, woodsmoke, espresso and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open on the attack, with a good core, impressive soil signature and just a bit of backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish. A very pleasant surprise! 2016-2025+. **92+.**

**2001 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

2001 is another vintage in Châteauneuf du Pape where I never anticipate seeing an example of Hommage bottled, as this was the year where the skies absolutely opened up late in the summer and flooding in the region was rampant. It is not that I disliked the handful of 2001 Châteauneufs that I have tasted in the past, and this wine has turned out pretty well, but this is really not anyone’s definition of a “top vintage” in the region. The bouquet is quite lovely today, offering up scents of cassis, tree bark, dark soil tones, black olives and a touch of herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, nascently complex and pretty well-balanced, with respectable depth at the core, moderate tannins and a long, quite promising finish. The wine is just a touch sinewy on the palate today and this characteristic may stay with the wine throughout its long life. However, this has far more complexity than the most recent vintages and is a more serious wine on all fronts, despite the deluge of 2001. 2021-2045+. **92.**

**2000 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 2000 Hommage from Château de Beaucastel is quite marked by brettanomyces and this will affect one’s appreciation of the wine, depending on one’s tolerance of brett. The bouquet is a mix of cassis, saddle leather, a fair bit of barnyard, dark soil tones and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classically proportioned, with a good core, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex finish that closes with good grip. If one really dislikes brett, then deduct several points from my score, but for those with some tolerance, this is a good bottle in the making- though still in need of far more time in the cellar to really blossom! 2025-2055+. **92.**

**1999 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 1999 vintage of Hommage à Jacques Perrin is a classic in the making and a wine I prefer far above its more highly-praised older sibling. The octane here is 13.5 percent and the wine offers up a deep and youthful bouquet of dark berries, cassis, peppercorn, cigar smoke, hung game, tree bark, dark soil and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully reserved in profile, with a rock solid core, ripe, moderate tannins and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced and promising finish. This is still a young wine and needs more bottle age, but it will be excellent. 2022-2060. **94.**

**1998 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The very ripe 1998 vintage in Châteauneuf du Pape has produced very few wines that I find impressive, and you can add the ’98 Hommage to my list of underwhelming, over the top wines. The label lists this at 13.5 percent octane as well, but it seems far riper than the 1999 (which is listed at the same alcohol level). This is the only vintage of Hommage with a higher

percentage of grenache in the blend and perhaps this is why it is less enthralling? The bouquet is deep, ripe and very glossy in its blend of jammy blackberries, roasted game, espresso, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and very monolithic in personality, with a fat core, some uncovered wood tannins and an overt note of bitterness from high alcohol on the moderately long finish. This wine may yet blossom with further bottle age, but really seems more stillborn than promising at this stage in its evolution. 2020-2040. **85.**

**1995 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 1995 vintage of the Hommage à Jacques Perrin is thirteen percent alcohol, and this makes a tremendous difference in terms of both structure and purity in the wine. The overtly glossy fruit of riper vintages like 2007 is nowhere to be found here, but this wine is also still pretty bound up in its structure at age twenty-one and will need more bottle age to fully blossom. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of cassis, dark berries, roasted game, tree bark, woodsmoke, pepper and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and starting to develop the complexity of maturity, with a good core, still some backend tannin to resolve and good, but hardly exceptional length on the focused finish. This is a very good bottle in the making, but it is not in the same, otherworldly league as 1989 Hommage and does not seem a big step up from the regular bottling at Beaucastel in this vintage. 2020-2045+. **92.**

**1994 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

I like the 1994 Hommage à Jacques Perrin a bit better than the 1995- both for drinking today and for its ultimate, long-term quality as well. There is a touch of brett here on the nose, but at a more manageable level than what is found in the 2000 iteration. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, grilled venison, pepper, the first touch of autumnal elements and a generous framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied complex and quite classic in profile, with a fine core, still a bit of melting tannin and excellent focus and balance on the long and complex finish. It is pretty clear that the earliest vintages of Hommage were the best! 2016-2035. **94.**

**1990 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 1990 Hommage à Jacques Perrin is also fully mature and is showing a bit more tertiary elements on both the nose and palate than the 1994 vintage. The bouquet again has just a touch of brettanomyces, but also offers up impressive depth and complexity in its mélange of dried dark berries, charred wood, roasted meats, a touch of balsam bough, cigar ash, dark soil tones and saddle leather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and at its apogee, with fine mid-palate depth, melted tannin, fine focus and a long, complex and old school finish. This is not as refined as the 1994 or 1989 versions, but it is excellent in its slightly more rustic persona (which is the vintage’s character after all). 2016-2035. **94.**

**1989 Châteauneuf du Pape “Hommage à Jacques Perrin”- Château de Beaucastel**

The 1989 Hommage à Jacques Perrin was the inaugural vintage for this bottling, and to my palate, still the finest by quite some margin. Prior to our vertical tasting, the 1989 Hommage was the vintage I had the most experience with and I was very happy to see that this wine continues to cruise along at a truly superb level more than twenty-five years out from the vintage. The bouquet is deep, complex and now *à point*, soaring from the glass in a blend of cassis, dark berries, botanicals, tree bark, new leather, dark soil tones and a topnote of cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with still a bit of backend tannin perking up the long, focused and very classy finish. The balance here is absolutely impeccable. Stunning juice in its prime of life today and with decades more life still ahead of it! 2016-2040. **97.**





As has been my custom for many years now, the Champagne feature of Issue 63 is organized first by type of Champagne, with **Sec** and **Demi-Sec** wines listed first, **Extra Brut** and **Brut Nature** second, **Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs** in the third section, **Non-Vintage Brut** in the fourth, **Non-Vintage Brut** and **Extra Brut Rosé** in the fifth, **Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs** in the sixth section, **Vintage-Dated Brut** and **Extra Brut** in the seventh and **Vintage-Date Rosé** in the eighth section. Within each non-vintage section, the wines are listed alphabetically. Within the groups of Vintage-Dated wines, they are grouped first by vintage, from youngest to oldest, and then alphabetically by producer within each vintage subsection. There are a lot of wines in this report, but with the index below and an understanding of the organization of the article, it should be fairly easy to find any specific wine that you may be looking for a note on in this feature.



### ***Alphabetical List of Champagne Tasted in This Feature:***

**L. Aubry Fils (Jouy-les-Reims)** “Premier Cru” Brut NV; “Le Nombre d’Or” Brut NV; “Premier Cru” Brut Rosé NV;

**Robert Barbichon et Fils (Gyé sur Seine):** Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV; “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut Réserve NV;

**Champagne Baron-Fuenté (Charly-sur-Marne):** “Grande Réserve” Brut NV; “Rosé Dolorès” Brut NV; 2006 Brut Millésime;

**Besserat de Bellefon (Épernay):** “Cuvée des Moines” Extra Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV; “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV; 2006 “Cuvée des Moines” Extra Brut Millésime;

**H. Billiot Fils (Ambonnay):** “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV; 2009 “Brut Millésimé” Grand Cru;

**Bollinger (Aÿ):** 1975 “R.D” Brut Millésime;

**Pierre Callot (Avize):** “1er Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2007 “les Avats” Vignes Anciennes Blanc de Blancs Brut;

**Charlot-Tanneux (Mardeuil):** “Expression” Extra Brut NV;

**Chartogne-Taillet (Merfy):** “les Couarres Château” Extra Brut; “les Heurtebise” Extra Brut; “Cuvée Sainte Anne” Brut NV; “Le Rosé” Brut NV;

**Gaston Chiquet (Dizy):** “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Grand Cru Brut NV; “Brut Tradition” NV;

**Champagne La Closerie- Jérôme Prévost (Gueux):** “Les Beguines” Extra Brut NV;

**Paul Clouët (Bouzy):** “Brut Grand Cru” NV; “Cuvée Prestige” Brut NV; “Brut Rosé” NV;

**Champagne Corbon (Avize)** Absolutement Brut NV; “Anthracite” Brut NV; 2005 “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime;

**R. H. Coutier (Ambonnay):** “Cuvée Tradition” Grand Cru Brut NV; “Cuvée Rosé” Grand Cru Brut NV;

**Dehours et Fils (Cerseuil):** “Trio S” Extra Brut NV; “Grande Réserve” Brut NV; 2006 Collection “les Genevraux” Extra Brut; 2005 Collection “la Côte en Bosses” Extra Brut; 2005 Collection “Brisefer” Extra Brut; 2009 Oeil de Perdrix “Rose” Brut Millésimé;

**Benoît Déhu (Fossoy):** “Cuvée de la Rue des Noyers” Extra Brut NV;

**Drappier (Urville):** Brut Nature NV; “Carte d’Or” Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV;

**Duval-Leroy (Vertus):** “Premier Cru” Brut NV; “Rosé Préstige” Brut NV;

**Champagne Fleury (Courteron):** Brut NV;

**Gatinois (Aÿ):** “Brut Tradition” NV; “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV;

**Champagne Geoffroy (Aÿ):** “Brut Expression” Premier Cru NV; “Rosé de Saignée” Premier Cru Brut NV; 2008 “Empreinte” 1er Cru Brut Millésime;

**Pierre Gimonnet et Fils (Cuis):** “Sélection Belles Années” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Cuvée Cuis” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2009 “Cuvée Fleuron” Blanc de Blancs Brut; 2008 “Cuvée Oenophile” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut; 2007 “Cuvée Paradoxe” Brut;

**Philippe Gonet (Mesnil-sur-Oger):** Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée 3210” Extra Brut NV; “Signature” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Roy Soleil” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV; “Grande Réserve” Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2007 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2005 Blanc de Blancs “Belemnita” Brut Millésime;

**Gosset (Épernay):** “Grand Blanc de Blancs” Brut NV; 2002 “Cuvée Celebris” Extra Brut Millésime;

**Henri Goutorbe (Aÿ):** “Cuvée Prestige” Premier Cru Brut NV; 2005 “Special Club” Brut Millésime;

**Champagne Grongnet (Étoges):** “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; 2008 “Special Club” Brut Millésime;

**Marc Hébrart (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ):** “Brut Sélection” Premier Cru NV; “Cuvée de Réserve” Premier Cru NV; Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV;

**Charles Heidsieck (Reims):** “Brut Réserve” NV; “Rosé Réserve” Brut NV; 2005 Brut Millésime; 2006 Brut Rosé Millésime;

**Champagne Henriot (Reims):** Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Cuve 38” V-2 Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Brut Souverain” NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2006 Brut Millésimé; 2000 “Cuvée des Enchanteleurs” Brut Millésime;

**Krug (Reims):** 1998 *Vintage Brut*; 1995 *Vintage Brut (Magnum)*;

**Benoît Lahaye (Bouzy):** “Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Naturessence” Brut Nature NV; “Brut Essential” NV; “Rosé de Macération” Extra Brut NV;

**Laherte Frères (Chavot):** “Rosé Ultradition” Brut NV;

**Jean Lallement et Fils (Verzenay):** “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV;

**Lamiable (Tours-sur-Marne):** “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV;

**Lanson (Reims):** “White Label” Sec NV; “Extra Age” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Black Label” Brut NV; “Black Label” Brut NV Magnum; “Extra Age” Brut NV; “Rose Label” Brut Rosé NV; “Extra Age” Brut Rosé NV; 2006 Clos Lanson Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime; 2002 “Gold Label” Brut Millésime; 2002 “Gold Label” Brut Millésime (Magnum); 1990 “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime (Magnum); 1988 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime (Magnum); 1976 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime (Magnum);

**Larmandier-Bernier (Vertus):** “Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Longitude” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; 2009 “Terre de Vertus” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature;

**J. Lasalle (Chigny-les-Roses):** 2005 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime;

**Domaine Georges Laval (Cumières):** “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Base Year 2013); “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV (Base Year 2013); “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV (Base Year 2011); 2011 “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature;

**David Léclapart (Trépail) :** “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs Non-Dosé NV LV10; “l’Apôtre” Blanc de Blancs Non-Dosé NV LV09; “l’Astre” Blanc de Noirs Non-Dosé NV LV11; “l’Alchimiste” Extra Brut Rosé NV;

**Champagne Lombard (Épernay):** Premier Cru Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Noirs 1er Cru Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Gr. Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Chouilly Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Cramant Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Mesnil-sur-Oger Gr. Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Verzenay Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV; “Tanagra” Grand Cru Brut NV; Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV; “Tanagra” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV;

**Arnaud Margaine (Villers-Marmery):** “l’Extra Brut” Premier Cru NV; “le Brut” Premier Cru NV; Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV;

**Marguet Père et Fils (Ambonnay):** “Shaman 12” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; “Shaman 12” Grand Cru Extra Brut Rosé NV; 2010 “les Bermonts” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut; 2010 “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Millésime; 2009 “les Crayères” Extra Brut Millésime;

**Marie-Courtin (Polisot):** “Résonance” Extra Brut NV; “Efflorescence” Extra Brut NV

**Christophe Mignon (Festigny):** Brut Nature NV; “Pur Meunier” Brut Rosé NV;

**Jean Milan (Oger):** “Spécial” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; 2009 “Symphorine” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut;

**Moët et Chandon (Épernay):** Brut Imperial NV (Early 1990’s Release); 1975 “Grand Vintage” Brut Millésime (Magnum); 1995 Dom Pérignon Brut Rosé “P2” Plenitudes;

**Pierre Moncuit (Mesnil-sur-Oger):** Blanc de Blancs Gr. Cru Extra Brut NV; “Hugues de Coulmet” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV;

**Moutard Père et Fils (Buxeuil):** “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV; “Rosé de Cuvaision” Brut NV;

**Mouzon-Leroux et Fils (Verzy):** “l’Atavique” Extra Brut Réserve NV; “l’Ineffable” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV; “l’Incandescent” Rosé Saignée Brut NV;

**Champagne Bruno Paillard (Reims):** Blanc de Blancs “Réserve Privée” Brut NV; “Première Cuvée” Brut NV; “Première Cuvée” Brut Rosé NV; 2008 “Assemblage” Brut Millésime; 2003 “N.P.U.” Brut Millésime;

**Franck Pascal (Baslieux-sous-Châtillon):** “Reliance” Brut Nature NV; “Tolérance” Brut Rosé NV; 2005 “Quintessence” Extra Brut;

**Pehu Simonet (Verzenay):** “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut NV; 2010 “Fins Lieux No. 5” Brut Millésime;

**Pierre Péters (Mesnil-sur-Oger):** “Cuvée de Réserve” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV; 2008 “lès Chétilons” Blanc de Blancs Brut;

**Philipponnat (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ):** 2006 Clos des Goisses Brut;

**Piper-Heidsieck (Reims):** “Cuvée Sublime” Demi-Sec; Brut NV; “Rosé Sauvage” Brut NV; 2006 “Vintage Brut”; 2002 “Cuvée Rare” Brut;

**Pol Roger (Épernay):** 2002 “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime; 1990 “Blanc de Chardonnay” Brut Millésime; 2006 Brut Rosé Millésime;

**Ponson (Coulommès la Montagne):** “la Petite Montagne” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV;

**Dom Ruinart (Reims):** Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2004 “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime; 2002 Brut Rosé Millésime;

**Champagne Jacques Selosse (Avize):** “Exquise” Blanc de Blancs Demi-Sec NV; 1999 Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Magnum);

**Salon (Mesnil-sur-Oger):** 1988 Blanc de Blancs Brut

**Saint Chamant (Épernay):** 1996 “Cuvée de Chardonnay” Brut Millésime

**Champagne Bernard Tormay (Bouzy):** “Carte d’Or” Brut NV;

**Varnier-Fannière (Avize):** “Grand Cru” Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV;

**Veuve Clicquot (Reims):** Brut NV; Brut Rosé NV; 2008 Brut Millésime; 2006 “La Grande Dame” Brut; 2008 Brut Rosé Millésime; 2006 “La Grande Dame” Brut Rosé;

**Vilmart et Cie (Rilly la Montagne):** “Grand Cellier” Brut NV; 2010 “Grand Cellier d’Or” Brut 1er Cru; 2007 “Coeur de Cuvée” Brut Millésime;

## THE BI-ANNUAL CHAMPAGNE REPORT SUMMER 2016



*A sunny June day in the vineyards of Mesnil-sur-Oger.*

I did not spend any time in the Champagne region during this past spring trip to Europe, as I decided to do a little prospecting in Campania this year, instead of returning to Champagne in April. I will be back in the region in the next several months to make some more cellar visits and get to know more of the principals in the region, which takes time at many of the *Grandes Marques* and seems to be the best way to really get some idea of methodology and philosophy at the larger houses, as much of their personnel here in the states seem more adept at turning aside technical questions than many an American politician on the campaign trail. Happily, upon my return to New York from my spring trip, I was able to make the acquaintance of Veuve Clicquot's relatively new *Chef de Cave*, Dominique Demarville, who began working at the *Grande Marque* alongside of the incumbent in 2006 and ascended to the top spot a couple of years later. He was in New York to show the new releases from the 2008 vintage from Clicquot, which are the first wines to incorporate some barrel fermentation in their *vins clairs* here since the decade of the 1960s. This will be part of the cellar program at Veuve Clicquot for all of their cuvées moving forward, and the results were quite evident and exciting, as they showed deeper and more complex palate impressions than the wines that had been done entirely in stainless steel

in the most recent years. My gut instinct is that this is only the tip of the iceberg of big things stirring at this iconic *Grande Maison* in the heart of Reims and I am already looking forward to future releases at Clicquot, including the first La Grande Dame vintages produced solely by Dominique Demarville! As readers will recall, I have been less than enthusiastic with several of the more recent bottlings of Clicquot that I have tasted in the last decade, but based on the exemplary quality across the board of the new releases, it seems very clear to me that Monsieur Demarville and the rest of the team at Veuve Clicquot are priming this estate to enter into a new golden age and we may very well see in the next several years the finest range of wines to emerge from these deep, *Crayères* cellars since the decade of the 1980s! One set of wines, no matter how impressive (and these were indeed a notable step up from recent releases) is not enough to proclaim the dawn of a renaissance, but I could not contain my excitement at tasting the entire portfolio of current releases from Veuve Clicquot in preparation for this article, as the wines far exceeded my recent expectations from the house! Good things are stirring here and I cannot wait to see the next releases in the coming year.

This most recent report on Champagne also gave me a chance to taste far more broadly of the wines from David Léclapart in Trépail, who is clearly one of the top biodynamic farmers on the Montagne de Reims, as well as a very talented winemaker. Monsieur Léclapart took over his family's three hectare domaine upon his father's passing in 1996, on the condition that he be allowed to immediately convert viticulture in the family's parcels to biodynamics, which he has done with great success. As I mentioned in passing in last year's report on my two weeks in Champagne, Monsieur Léclapart has a superb reputation for his wines amongst other top growers in the region, not to mention amongst the most savvy merchants in Reims, and his wines are amongst the more expensive bottlings of "Grower Champagne" that one finds in the best-stocked *cavistes* in the city, but now that I have had a chance to taste a full range of his excellent wines, I fully understand why this is the case. Readers may also recall that David is the source for the chardonnay that Benoît Marguet purchases for his *Tête de Cuvée* bottling of Sapience. I will most assuredly be scheduling a visit to taste *sur place* with David Léclapart on my next trip to Champagne. Like many of Champagne's most passionate proponents of biodynamics, the Léclapart wines are produced first and foremost in the vineyards and it is quite clear that David is perfectly content to allow the character of each growing season to shape the style of his wines. In the cellars, he ferments his *vins clairs* solely with indigenous yeasts, in either enamel-lined steel tanks or older Burgundy barrels (which he purchased from Domaine Leflaive back in 1999 and which were four years of age at purchase), with the wines undergoing malolactic fermentation if they are so inclined (which is most of the time) and he only uses *dosage* in less ripe years, with many of his bottlings *non-dosé*. As noted above, he farms three hectares of vines, all in Trépail, with ninety percent of the vineyards planted to chardonnay and ten percent to pinot noir. This breakdown neatly mirrors that of the vineyard plantations in general in Trépail (which is eighty-nine percent chardonnay), as this village is one of the few on the Montagne de Reims where chardonnay is better-suited to the underlying *terroir* than pinot noir. All of Monsieur Léclapart's bottlings hail from a single vintage, which he designates on the back label with a code, such as LV09, which indicates the wine is from the 2009 vintage. He does not presently age his wines the requisite three years *sur latte* to declare them as vintage wines, though each and every one is the product of a single year.

As I went into the changes that are starting to stir in viticulture in Champagne at the best domaines in quite some detail a year ago, I do not see any reason to devote a lot of space to discussing farming in the region again this year. However, it is becoming the single most important barometer of quality in the bottle, and those who are intent on drinking the finest quality wines the region has to offer would do well to start learning who is farming their vineyards or sourcing their grapes from growers using organic or biodynamic viticultural methods. When I was in the region a year ago, I spent plenty of time out wandering in the vines and was happy to see more and more vineyards being farmed with organic precepts, though, as I noted at the time, this is still a very small percentage of the overall acreage that is under vine in Champagne. But, progress is being made and this augurs very well for even higher average quality in the wines of the region in the years to come. I look forward to the day when those who do not utilize organic farming methods in Champagne are the exception, rather than the rule. Of course, as long as there are significant segments of the market that really do not care at all about anything other than lower prices for the Champagne that they offer (and when one looks around at some of the Champagne listings from big supermarket chains and the like across Europe and the US it is pretty easy to see who these buyers are), there will always be dis-incentives for farmers in the region doing the right thing in their vineyard parcels. However, for serious connoisseurs of the wines of Champagne, the growing number of high quality options produced from organically-farmed vineyards in the market is cause for optimism for the future here. As I noted last year, the simple equation is that organic and biodynamic farming methods produce far better fruit to work with and this translates seamlessly and effortlessly into higher quality wines in the bottle. One has to do decidedly more work out in the vines during the growing season, but once this is done, the wines are simply superior even if nothing else is changes in the cellar. It would be wise for growers and *Grandes Marques* to start stating that they are using healthier farming methods on their back labels (if this is the case), as this would become a very good mark of quality for the finished wine in the bottle for consumers who are a bit less experienced with the wines of Champagne.

As I noted to subscribers a few weeks before the end of June, the reason this issue was held up for release was that I was awaiting a tasting of Lanson Champagne here in New York on July 6<sup>th</sup> to preview the new single vineyard, Blanc de Blancs bottling from the house, Clos Lanson. This is the wine from a single, one hectare vineyard planted solely to chardonnay that lies just above the cellars and offices of this *Grande Marque*, and is in fact, the only producing vineyard in the city of Reims. The Lanson family had owned this vineyard since the late nineteenth century (it was originally cleared and planted in the eighteenth century), but had always used it in one of their blended cuvées prior to their selling the house. When Lanson's present owner, Philippe Baijot purchased Lanson in 2006, he felt that the house would be crazy not to produce a single vineyard wine from this small and unique parcel and immediately began the process that eventually has been realized with the upcoming release of the 2006 vintage of Clos Lanson. I am sure that the principals at Lanson were very curious to see how the wines would evolve with aging in their cellars, as this parcel had never been bottled on its own previously, and the real question in everyone's mind when the first few vintages were bottled and tucked away to age on their fine lees was whether or not the quality of the *terroir* of the Clos Lanson would be sufficiently high in quality to merit its own bottling. I do not know at what point in the early development years of Clos Lanson that it was decided that the *terroir* here was indeed very fine and the wine would be able to stand proudly on its quality, not just merit notice

for its rarity, but by the time I visited at Lanson in 2013, everyone at the *Grande Marque* was looking forward to the release of the first vintage of 2006 in the coming years.

The Clos Lanson sits on the summit of the hill where Lanson has its *maison* and cellars, with a very, very chalky base of soil and a uniquely warm microclimate, as it is not only enclosed by its surrounding walls, but also by the urban heat of the city of Reims. In fact, the vineyard is located only a short walk from the cathedral in the city. The parcel is currently planted in two similarly-sized blocks, with the older dating back to 1962 and the younger vines here having gone into the ground in 1985, so the vineyard ranges from thirty to fifty-plus years of age today. The team at Lanson has farmed it organically since 2006, and it is the crown jewel of their current program to convert their own vineyards over to organic farming methods. The *maison* owns one hundred and twenty-six hectares of their own vines today, and so far, sixteen hectares have been fully converted and certified by Demeter. Eventually, all of their own vineyards will be switched over to organic viticulture, and then perhaps, they can start working on the grape growers with whom they also work with for some of their fruit needs. But, one step at a time, and the fact that they have begun to convert over to organics is very good news indeed. The Clos Lanson is barrel-fermented in older casks, with half hailing from Burgundy and the other half from oak harvested in the Argonne forest, which was once home to all of the wood used by *tonneliers* in Champagne for the barrel needs of producers in the region. The casks were five to six years of age when the 2006 was introduced into them and the goal is to always maintain older casks for the fermentation and initial *elevage* of the Clos Lanson bottling. The *vins clairs* for this cuvée spend several additional months in their barrels prior to being assembled and bottled.

One of the things that I wondered about since visiting the vineyard a few years ago was how the wine would ultimately show stylistically, given that the microclimate here is certainly a few degrees warmer than what is found in most of the wind-swept, sweeping hillsides on the Montagne de Reims or Côte des Blancs. The new *Chef de Cave*, Hervé Dantan, noted that they routinely realize a full degree higher potential alcohol in the grapes grown in Clos Lanson, but noted that this is still only eleven percent, and the wine is still going to share the racy, structured style for aging that is the hallmark of all the Lanson bottlings. As the Clos Lanson, like all the other wines here, does not undergo malolactic fermentation, the range that we tasted in New York was very much characterized by the fine, racy spine of acidity that is the calling card of the house of Lanson, and this is clearly a very refined, tightly-knit and ageworthy cuvée that is very much in the Lanson tradition. This is particularly evident in the first vintage to be released, the 2006, which is from a year that is quite fine and is generally at a very good point for drinking today, with most of the '06 vintage bottlings now in their peak periods of drinkability. Not so the 2006 Clos Lanson, which is still defined by the refined purity and bounce of a youthful wine that has not yet reached its peak, and given its lovely raciness out of the blocks, this certainly augurs very well for the potential longevity of this new cuvée. I was also very much impressed with the lovely chalky signature of the Clos Lanson, as the limestone here is very differently presented in the finished wine than either the *Crayères* that we associate with so many Blanc de Blancs bottlings hailing from the Côte de Blancs, or the Chablis-like chalky minerality of the Kimmeridgian Limestone found in the Côte de Bars. The limestone of the Clos Lanson introduces a notably saline element in the wine that is quite unique, not to mention compelling.



At the tasting here in New York, we tasted several young vintages of Clos Lanson that are still in their infancy in the cellars in Reims, including the 2014, 2012, 2010, 2009 and 2008, but I have only published notes below on the finished and soon to be released 2006 bottling. Of the unreleased vintages, only the 2009 and 2008 were really close to finished wines at this point in time, with the '08 showing the very classic profile of this fine vintage and the 2009 promising to be more voluptuous out of the blocks and the first early vintage of Clos Lanson that is likely to drink well upon release. The 2006 is beautifully structured and understated at the present time, which may keep it initially a bit below the radar, but the underlying depth and complexity inherent in this wine will clearly blossom with further bottle age into one of the great single vineyard bottlings in all of Champagne. I suspect that when the superb 2009 is released a few years down the road (and quite logically, the team at Lanson has decided that it will be offered into the market ahead of the more tightly-knit 2008) the buzz will really begin around this new cuvée, as that wine is going to be delivering fireworks in the glass right from the start! But, the 2006 is probably the superior wine in the long run and it will be well worth a special search for Champagne connoisseurs to find a few bottles for the cellar when it arrives in the market. There were just under eight thousand bottles of the 2006 Clos Lanson produced, so it is a pretty limited cuvée, but not so small as to be nearly impossible to find in the market. It truly is a very exciting new addition to the firmament of Champagne!



### ***Sec and Demi-Sec***

#### **Lanson “White Label” Sec NV (Reims)**

**Disgorged June 2015**

As I noted last year, Lanson’s “White Label” Sec includes more chardonnay in the blend than their non-vintage Brut bottling of “Black Label”, as the wine is comprised of a blend of thirty-eight percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. Like all Lanson wines, it does not undergo malo, which gives a good spine of acidity to carry the higher *dosage* of a Sec. The bouquet on the current release offers up scents of apple, peach, bread dough, a nice touch of minerality, orange blossoms and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows a nice base of minerality, with plenty of sweetness (nicely buttressed by zesty acids), frothy *mousse*, good length and grip and a well-balanced finish. This is a tad too sweet for my palate for casual sipping, but I would like this very much with a not too sweet dessert. It is a very well-made example of Sec. 2016-2025. **89.**

#### **Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Sublime” Demi-Sec NV (Reims)**

The new release of the Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Sublime” Demi-Sec is really very lovely, with plenty of vibrancy and bouncy acidity to carry the extra residual sugar. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus zest and a topnote of floral tones redolent of iris blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, very refined *mousse*, moderate sweetness and very good length and grip on the clean and focused finish. Good juice. 2016-2025. **90+.**

#### **Champagne Jacques Selosse “Exquise” Blanc de Blancs Demi-Sec NV (Avize)**

I had never had the pleasure to taste this limited release bottling of Demi-Sec from Anselme Selosse, which he crafts with an eye to matching with dessert and which it paired beautifully with at the end of a vertical Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche dinner that I will be reporting on in the next issue. Monsieur Selosse only makes a thousand bottles of Exquise, with this particular iteration disgorged in May of 2015 and finished off with a *dosage* of around twenty-four grams per liter. This is the same base wine as his Brut Initial cuvée, which hails from the lower sections of the slope of his top vineyards in Avize, Oger and Cramant, and simply finished off with a more generous *dosage*. The current release of Exquise is really lovely, offering up a complex nose of pear, *patissière*, chalky minerality, custard and a pungent topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with an excellent spine of acidity to carry the additional sweetness, fine focus, refined *mousse* and a very long, crisp and moderately sweet finish. Just a lovely wine. 2016-2030. **94.**

### ***Non-Vintage Extra Brut or Brut Nature***

#### **Robert Barbichon et Fils Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine) Disg: May 2015**

The current release of Blanc de Noirs from Thomas Barbichon is the same base wine as that which I reported on after my visit to this fine Aube estate last year, though this bottle was disgorged a few months later and was finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter (whereas I was tasting a *non-dosé* version last spring. This cuvée is comprised of one hundred percent pinot noir and hails from the base year of 2011. The bouquet has blossomed beautifully since I last tasted this wine, offering up a pure and complex blend of lime, green apple, flinty minerality, a touch of menthol, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with ripe acids, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. A lovely wine that has now blossomed completely. 2016-2030. **91.**

**Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Extra Brut NV (Épernay) Disgorged March 2012**

The current release in the market of the non-vintage Cuvée des Moines Extra Brut is the same disgorgement date as the one I reported on last year, and the wine has really blossomed beautifully with another year in bottle. As I noted last year, the wine has fully forty-five percent pinot meunier in its blend, which provides lovely floral elements on the nose. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of apple, white peach, gentle white flowers, lovely soil tones, a touch of almond and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, lovely backend soil signature and a long, open and quite dry finish. This is really drinking nicely right now. 2016-2025. 90+.

**Charlot-Tanneux “Expression” Extra Brut NV (Mardeuil) Disgorged January 2015**

The current release of Vincent Charlot’s “Expression” is from the base year of 2011 and was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. As I noted last year, Monsieur Charlot continues to use the family domaine name of Charlot-Tanneux for his bottlings that are a blend from different vineyard sources, with his single vineyard wines bottled under the Vincent Charlot label. As I noted last year, the *vins clairs* here are fermented with indigenous yeasts, do not undergo malo and are aged for fully eight months in cask prior to blending. The blend is seventy percent pinot meunier, twenty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. The nose is deep and excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, a touch of tangerine, fresh-baked bread, plenty of smokiness and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, plenty of complexity and very good, but not great length on the beautifully balanced finish. The wine is not quite as long as last year’s version, but then again, this is the difference between the very good 2010 growing season and the far more difficult year of 2011. But, all in all, a ringing success for a 2011 and no one will be disappointed with this deep and complex bubbly! 2016-2025. 91.

**Chartogne-Taillet “les Couarres Château” Extra Brut (Merfy) Disgorged August 2015**

This the 2010 version of les Couarres Château, which I tasted last April when visiting with Alexandre Chartogne at the domaine in Merfy. When I tried it last spring, Alexandre disgorged it right before we tasted it and he had not yet decided on a *dosage* for the wine, which ended up being 4.5 grams per liter. This single vineyard bottling is produced entirely from pinot noir vines planted in 1987, and, as I noted last year, with the underlying soil here more influenced by *Tuffeau* and chalk than the neighboring vineyard of les Couarres (from which Alexandre also makes a *lieu à dit* bottling). The bouquet today is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex blend of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of *patissière*, chalky minerality, just a whisper of buttery oak and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is absolutely superb, with its fine structure beautifully buffered by its judicious *dosage*. The wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and seamless in its balance, with outstanding mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a great pleasure to drink today, but this is a wine that is built to age long and gracefully and I would love to drink it a decade down the road! 2016-2035+. 94.

**Chartogne-Taillet “les Heurtebise” Extra Brut (Merfy) Disgorged October 2015**

The current release of Les Heurtebise from Chartogne-Taillet is from the 2009 vintage and was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. As I mentioned in my report last spring, the vineyard has sandstone soils and relatively old vine chardonnay. The 2009 has a stunning nose of pears, delicious apples, *crème patissière*, a great base of soil, fresh almond and gentle floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and

rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and grip and a very, very long, soil-driven and nascently complex finish. This has the great depth in the mid-palate of 2009, but is seamless and really tightly-knit, with outstanding structure and purity for this riper vintage. Great juice. 2016-2035+. **94.**

**Champagne La Closerie “Les Beguines” Extra Brut- Jérôme Prévost (Gueux)**

The present release in the market of Jérôme Prévost’s beautiful Les Beguines bottling is base year 2013, which is note don the label with a small code on the front label of “LC13”. As I noted when reporting on the lovely 2012 version , this cuvée hails from Monsieur Prévost’s two hectare vineyard of Les Beguines and is composed entirely of pinot meunier. Like all of Monsieur Prévost’s wines, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts in a combination of older burgundy barrels and *demi-muids* and is aged for only eighteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The 2013 Les Beguines is a lovely follow-up to the previous release, wafting from the glass in a pure and complex nose of apple, pear, brioche, just a touch of buttery oak and a beautifully complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still youthfully brisk and racy, with an outstanding core of fruit, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse*, impeccable balance and a very long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is very, very easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and really should be allowed to repose in the cellar for a few years and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035+. **93+.**

**Champagne Corbon Absolument Brut NV (Avize)**

**Disgorged March 2015**

I was very happy to hear this year that Agnès Corbon and her father have undertaken conversion of all of their vineyards to organic viticulture, which will be done incrementally over the coming years, with already about fifteen to twenty percent of the vineyards farmed this way. This is an important step, as the Corbon family is one of the most respected growers in Avize. The new release of Madame Corbon’s Absolument Brut is from the base year of 2008. The *cépages* this year is sixty percent chardonnay (half from Avize and half from Verneuil) and twenty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and the wine saw zero *dosage* after its nearly seven years on the fine lees. The wine offers up a superb nose of tart pear, lemon, plenty of smokiness, fresh almond and a complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core, lovely mineral drive, refined *mousse* and excellent balance and grip on the very well-balanced finish. A fine example. 2016-2035+. **91+.**

**Dehours et Fils “Trio S” Extra Brut NV (Cerseuil)**

Jérôme Dehours started this solera in 1998 and began bottling a cuvée from it in the 2005 vintage. As the name suggests, it is comprised of an equal blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, and each year Monsieur Dehours bottles one-third of the solera and refreshes it with the new harvest’s wines. The current release is supposed to have a date of disgorgement on the back label, but mine had none, so I do not have any idea how long ago this was disgorged. In any event, the bouquet is really lovely, offering up a constellation of white peach, apple, brioche, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of lavender and gentle meunier florals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine *mousse*, lovely focus and balance, but a finish that is just a touch short by the high standards of this house. A fine bottle. 2016-2030. **90.**

**Benoît Déhu “Cuvée de la Rue des Noyers” Extra Brut NV (Fossoy)**

Benoît Déhu began running his family’s estate, Déhu Père et Fils at the start of the new millennium, after having worked for a few years at Bollinger. They are located at the western end of the Marne Valley, near Château Thierry. He began to convert his family’s vineyards over

to organic farming immediately upon his arrival and in 2011, he started to produce this single vineyard bottling of pinot meunier, “Cuvée de la Rue des Noyers”, from a 1.7 hectare parcel that he farms biodynamically and labels under his own name. The *vin clair* is barrel fermented and the wine is finished off with a *dosage* of one gram per liter, with the base year of the current release being 2012. The wine is comprised entirely of pinot meunier and shows a bit of oak influence in its fine bouquet of white peach, *patissière*, gentle nuttiness, a fine base of soil, white flowers and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with outstanding mid-palate depth, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and lovely balance on the long, complex and very classy finish. Monsieur Déhu began using barrels made from oak trees in Fossoy in 2013, so I would imagine that the oak influence here will diminish in coming years (though it is hardly intrusive now). This is really a lovely, complex and personality-laden bottle of pinot meunier! 2016-2030. **92.**

**Drappier Brut Nature NV (Urville)**

**Disgorged August 2010**

While Drappier has their cellars in Reims, their vineyards are in the heart of the Aube in Urville and this is one of the flagship estates in the Côte des Bars. Their Brut Nature bottling is a Blanc de Noirs that is comprised entirely of pinot noir. The wine is barrel-fermented and aged thirty months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, with no *dosage* and a very low SO2 regimen. The current release delivers a fine aromatic blend of apple, tangerine, gentle smokiness, a lovely base of flinty soil tones, warm biscuits and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and a long, vibrant and complex finish. Given that this has been given some bottle age, in addition to its time on its fine lees, it is probably from the base year of 2007 and is really starting to come into its apogee of peak drinkability today. A lovely, low fat bottle that is developing beautifully with bottle age. 2016-2025. **91+.**

**Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée 3210” Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The Gonet Blanc de Blancs “Cuvée 3210” is sourced from fifty-fifty split of vineyards both in Mesnil and in the village of Montgueux in the Aube. The wine is aged three years *sur latte* and receives zero *dosage*. The current release offers up scents of pear, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, a touch of almond and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and excellent backend mineral drive on the long and nascently complex finish. This has more mid-palate stuffing than most of the other non-vintage bottlings from Monsieur Gonet and is cut in a more powerful style. Another year or two in the cellar will really allow it to blossom fully, but it is drinking well out of the blocks. 2016-2030+. **90+.**

**Champagne Grongnet “Carpe Diem” Extra Brut NV (Étoges)    Disgorged February 2015**

Cécile Grongnet’s Carpe Diem bottling is a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and fifteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with the *vins clairs* for this bottling spending nine months in cask prior to *assemblage* and then five and a half years aging on its fine lees (under cork, rather than crown cap). It was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and is base year 2008, so this is the same bottling I reported on last spring. The bouquet is now wide open and really singing, offering up scents of apple, hazelnut, chalky minerality, a touch of *fleur de sel* and a topnote of lime blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and *à pointe*, with great focus and balance, very elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and utterly seamless finish. Lovely Extra Brut and a superb value. 2016-2030+. **93.**

### **Benoît Lahaye “Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV (Bouzy)**

As noted a year ago, Benoît Lahaye’s non-vintage Brut Nature bottling is comprised of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with eighty percent of the pinot noir hailing from Bouzy and twenty percent from Ambonnay. The *vins clairs* go through full malo and are fermented entirely in older casks. The wines spend two and a half years resting in the cellars *sur latte*, though I did not have the date of disgorgement of the most recent release, so I do not know the base year for this bottling. In any event, the wine is excellent, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, *patissière*, complex soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and lovely balance on the long, brisk and very well-balanced finish. I could not find information on *dosage* on this release, but I would guess it is in the two grams per liter range, though the wine shows perfect balance on the backend. 2016-2030+. 92+.



*Some of the celestial stars in the firmament of today’s Champagne.*

### **Benoît Lahaye “Naturessence” Brut Nature NV (Bouzy)**

Benoît Lahaye’s “Naturessence” bottling of Brut Nature is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, sourced from Monsieur Lahaye’s oldest vines in the villages Bouzy, Ambonnay, Tauxières and Voipreux. The wine is barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts, spends ten months aging in older cask and is finished with a *dosage* of between four and five grams per liter. The current release offers up a deep and very classy bouquet of apple, peach, *patissière*, a touch of hazelnut, beautifully complex soil tones, warm biscuits and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a superb core



of fruit, marvelous soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and very complex finish. This is just a dynamite wine! 2016-2030. **94.**

**Lamiable “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)**

The current release of Lamiable’s non-vintage bottling of Extra Brut is composed of a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* fermented in older casks and I assume this is the same wine as the non-vintage Brut with lower *dosage*. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of quinine, complex soil tones, plenty of smokiness and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, brisk and long, with a fine core, impressive complexity, elegant *mousse* and a fairly assertive spine of acidity keeping the finish quite snappy and bone dry. I wonder if this is the same release as I tasted last year, with just another years’ worth of bottle age? This is really excellent, but one has to already be a convert to Extra Brut, as there is little or no buffering sweetness here and it would have been nice to have had the *dosage* printed on the back label. But very well-made and seems even a touch longer on the backend than the current release of the straight Brut. Good juice. 2016-2030. **91.**

**Larmandier-Bernier “Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus) Disg: May 2014**

The current release of Larmandier-Bernier “Latitude” is comprised of seventy percent base year 2011 and thirty percent reserve wines and was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. This bottling hails from chardonnay fruit all grown in the southern sector of Vertus, which contains more clay than in the rest of the village and where traditionally, pinot noir would be planted. The wine offers up a superb nose of pear, brioche, lovely soil tones, a bit of smokiness and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex finish that closes with a touch of citrus peel. Good juice. 2016-2030+. **91.**

**Larmandier-Bernier “Longitude” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus)**

I do not now the date of disgorgement of the current release of Larmandier-Bernier’s “Longitude” Blanc de Blancs, which incorporates the family’s production from their vineyards in the prime, chalky sector of the premier cru village of Vertus with production from some of their grand cru holdings. The wine’s *dosage* is four grams per liter and the wine offers up a lovely and youthful nose of apple, pear, limestone minerality, fresh almond, warm bread and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, brisk and still fairly primary finish. With its low *dosage*, this will be most enjoyable to drink today for true fans of Extra Brut, but with a couple of years in the cellar to allow the structure to soften up a bit more, it will be a true crowd pleaser. 2018-2030+. **91.**

**Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Cumières)**

**Base Year 2013**

The 2013 base year bottling of Vincent Laval’s “Cumières” Brut Nature is an outstanding young wine, but like all of Monsieur Laval’s bottlings, it is built for the cellar and really deserves at least a few years’ worth of bottle age before opening. As is typical of this cuvée, it is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The bouquet is deep and utterly superb, offering up a youthful mélange of apple, tangerine, complex soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with great mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and utterly superb length and grip on the brisk and seamless finish. All the beautiful wine needs is a bit of patience. 2018-2040. **93.**



**David Léclapart “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs Non-Dosé NV (Trépail) LV10**

The current release of David Léclapart’s “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2010, with half of the *vins clairs* for this bottling barrel-fermented and the other half in enameled stainless steel tanks. This is a full malo bubbly and received no *dosage*. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a deep mélange of pear, apple, fresh almond, lovely minerality, *crème patissière* and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, vibrant and shows off gorgeous mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and a very long, poised and seamlessly balanced finish. I liked this version even better than the 2008 base year version of l’Artiste I tasted last year during my two weeks in the region, and I wonder if this is a reflection of a bit of palate fatigue last year! This is really fine juice. 2016-2035. **93.**

**David Léclapart “l’Apôtre” Blanc de Blancs Non-Dosé NV (Trépail) LV09**

The current release of “l’Apôtre” Blanc de Blancs from David Léclapart is base year 2009. This is produced from Monsieur Léclapart’s oldest chardonnay vines in Trépail and the wine is barrel-fermented entirely. The wine’s bouquet gently wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of pear, apple, a discreet touch of butter, brioche, beautiful chalky soil tones and delicate scents of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with marvelous transparency, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the complex, refined and very long finish. Given that the 2009 is a riper year, I was so impressed with the elegant shape that the l’Apôtre from Monsieur Léclapart has been able to champion. Great juice. 2016-2035+. **94+.**

**David Léclapart “l’Astre” Blanc de Noirs Non-Dosé NV (Trépail) LV11**

The David Léclapart “l’Astre” Blanc de Noirs LV11 is base year 2011 and is composed entirely of pinot noir. The wine delivers superb refinement and complexity in its bouquet of white peach, fresh-baked bread, a touch of nutskin, a fine base of soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of bergamot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a lovely core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, bright, seamless acids and impressive mineral drive on the long and complex finish. There is perhaps a touch less mid-palate amplitude here due to the difficulties of the 2011 vintage, but there is absolutely nothing “off vintage” about this superb bottle of Champagne! 2016-2025. **92.**

**Champagne Lombard Premier Cru Extra Brut NV (Épernay) Disgorged June 14, 2016**

The Champagne Lombard non-vintage Extra Brut is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and hails from the base year of 2009, having spent six years of aging in the Lombard cellars. The nose is bright and youthfully complex, offering up scents of apple, white peach, a fine base of soil, fresh-baked bread and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This was only disgorged a couple of weeks before I tasted it, but seemed to be showing no ill effects from its recent disgorgement and really is a quite impressive example, but the possibility exists that it had not recovered fully and may be even better than my score reflects. 2016-2025. **89+.**

**Champagne Lombard Blanc de Noirs 1er Cru Extra Brut NV (Épernay) Disg: May 2016**

The Blanc de Noirs bottling of Extra Brut from Champagne Lombard is composed entirely of Montagne de Reims-sourced pinot noir, all from the village of Chigny-les-Roses. The wine is from the base year of 2011 and was finished with a four grams per liter *dosage*. The bouquet is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, apple blossoms,

*patissière*, a fine base of saline soil tones and a hint of smokiness to come in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright, well-integrated acids and very good length and grip on the soil-driven finish. This is a lovely gastronomic bubbly and is quite well made and elegant in profile. 2016-2025. **90.**

**Champagne Lombard Blanc de Blancs “Gr. Cru” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg: 1/16**

The Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs from Champagne Lombard hails entirely from top villages in the Côte de Blancs, with fifty percent of the blend hailing from Mesnil, twenty-five percent Chouilly, fifteen percent Avize and ten percent Cramant. The Mesnil *vin clair* does not go through malo and the entire blend is aged six months in older casks prior to bottling. The wine spent four years aging *sur latte* and is from the base year of 2011. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of pear, delicious apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, a touch of the pastry cream to come and a delicate topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, focused and nicely precise finish. This is really quite fine today and should age nicely for at least the next decade as well. Impressive juice. 2016-2026+. **91.**

**Champagne Lombard “Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disgorged January 2016**

The Champagne Lombard “Grand Cru” Brut Nature non-vintage bottling is from the base year of 2011 and is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay (from the same villages as above) and fifty percent pinot noir, with all of the grapes hailing from top villages, including Verzenay and Verzy for the pinot noir. The wine was aged four years on its fine lees. The nose wafts from the glass in a really superb blend of white peach, apple, a touch of fresh almond, *patissière*, really lovely soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and really deep at the core, with excellent complexity, refined *mousse*, bright, well-integrated acids and outstanding length and grip on the poised and classy finish. This cuvée is even a touch longer than the Blanc de Blancs version and is a dynamite bottle of Brut Nature! 2016-2030. **92.**

**Champagne Lombard “Chouilly Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg. Jan 2016**

The current release of the Chouilly Brut Nature from the Lombard family is again from the base year of 2011 and was aged four years on its fine lees. The wine is excellent on the nose, revealing a mélange of ripe pear, apple, toasted almond, chalky minerality, brioche and a topnote of lemon blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, ripe, seamless acids and excellent length and grip on the well-buffered finish. The four years aging *sur latte* here has really made this impeccably balanced wine a fine drink right out of the blocks. Lovely juice. 2016-2030. **92.**

**Champagne Lombard “Cramant Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg. Jan 2016**

The Cramant Brut Nature bottling in the grand cru village cuvées from Champagne Lombard is from the base year of 2009 and spent fully six years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release into the market. The nose shows the ripeness of '09 to very flattering effect, wafting from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, a touch of fresh apricot, *crème patissière*, a bit of hazelnut, gentle smokiness and a complex base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit broader-shouldered than the Chouilly version, with a rock solid core, brisk acids and slightly coarse *mousse*. The finish is very long and nicely mineral driven, with impressive grip and focus, but overall, it is not as polished (today?) as the Chouilly cuvée, despite hailing from the superior base year. More bottle age will certainly assist here in adding a bit more elegance, and five years down the road, my score may seem a bit conservative. 2017-2030. **88+.**

**Champagne Lombard “Mesnil-sur-Oger Gr. Cru” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg. 1/16**

The Champagne Lombard Mesnil-sur-Oger bottling of Brut Nature is base year 2011, like the Chouilly bottling and was aged four years on its fine lees. The bouquet is a touch less developed out of the blocks than the Chouilly, but shows lovely promise in its youthful blend of tart pear, lemon, a touch of menthol, chalky minerality, brioche and white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit today, with a good core, very elegant *mousse*, beautifully-integrated acids and excellent length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This needs a couple of years in the cellar to really blossom fully, but it is going to be outstanding when it opens up. 2018-2030+. **92.**

**Champagne Lombard “Verzenay Grand Cru” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg. Jan 2016**

The Champagne Lombard Verzenay bottling is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the wine spending four years aging *sur latte* and hailing from the base year of 2011. The wine offers up a simply superb bouquet of white peach, apple, complex minerality, warm biscuits, discreet smokiness and a touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthfully structured, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, still quite primary finish. Like the Mesnil-sur-Oger bottling, this really deserves at least a couple of years in the cellar to blossom, as the raw materials here are very promising and one just needs to wait for the structure to peel back a bit more. 2018-2030+. **91.**

**Arnaud Margaine “l’Extra Brut” Premier Cru NV (Villers-Marmery) Disg. July 2015**

As I mentioned last year, the Arnaud Margaine Extra Brut is actually a Blanc de Blancs bottling, but it does not state this anywhere on the label. The *vins clairs* for this cuvée do not go through malo. The bouquet of the new release wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and a long, crisp and complex finish. I would guess the *dosage* here is around three grams per liter and the wine really works nicely at the table. 2016-2030. **90+.**

**Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 12” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Ambonnay) Disg: Feb. 2016**

The “Shaman 12” bottling is Benoît Marguet’s new name for his “Elements” bottling, as someone else already had a trademark on the Elements name and forced a change. As the name suggests, this is base year 2012, with fifteen percent of the blend comprised of the reserve wine solera that was started here with fully organically grown wine in 2010. The *cépages* is sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine is a very worthy follow-up to the superb Elements 11, as it offers up a great bouquet of white peach, apple, complex minerality, *patissière*, dried flowers and just a whisper of spicy oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, refined and racy, with its full-bodied format rock solid at the core. The *mousse* is elegant, the focus and cut exemplary and the finish is long, complex and classy. This is simply one of the very best non-vintage bottlings on the market today! 2016-2035. **92+.**

**Marie-Courtin “Résonance” Extra Brut NV (Polisot)**

**Disgorged January 2015**

As I noted a couple of years ago, Dominique Moreau makes her Résonance cuvée entirely from pinot noir from vineyards in the village of Polisot, with this bottling hailing from vines at the top of the slope. The current release is base year 2012 and was bottled without *dosage*. The wine is excellent (and a fine follow-up to the last example of this cuvée I tasted, which was base year 2010), wafting from the glass in a deep and youthfully complex blend of apple, white peach, beautifully mineral limestone soil notes, lime blossoms and sourdough bread.

On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, brisk and very well-balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, lovely focus and grip and a very long, still fairly primary finish. This has the great signature minerality of the Aube and the structural balance to really blossom into something special with another year or two in the cellar. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2035. **92.**

**Marie-Courtin “Efflorescence” Extra Brut NV (Polisot) Disgorged November 2013**

Dominique Moreau’s Efflorescence bottling is all barrel-fermented and comprised entirely of pinot noir, which she selects from the lower sections of the slope, where there is more clay in the soil, as she feels the fruit here has broader shoulders and marries more beautifully with the barrel fermentation. The casks she uses are older, and like all of her wines, the Efflorescence is fermented with indigenous yeasts and finished off *non-dosé*. This is from the base year of 2010. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet apple, white peach, *patissière*, smoky overtones, a beautiful base of soil and just a touch of butter from the older casks. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely bass notes from the heavier soil tones, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the nicely focused finish. I might have liked to have seen just a touch of *dosage* here, as the combination of the barrel fermentation and the richer, clay soils makes the finish just a touch blunt, and this might have been just a touch more suave with just a gram or two to buffer the backend structural elements. But, the raw materials here are really strong and even if I like the overall balance a bit better on the Madame Moreau’s Résonance bottling, this is still strong juice. 2016-2030. **90.**

**Christophe Mignon Brut Nature NV (Festigny) Disgorged February 2015**

As I noted a couple of years ago, Christophe Mignon is a pinot meunier specialist, with the fruit for his non-vintage bottling hailing from vineyards in Festigny and neighboring village of Le Breuil. The current release of his non-vintage bottling is a fifty-fifty blend of 2012 and 2011 vintages, from thirty-five plus year-old vines, with the wine having spent two years aging *sur latte* and is bottled without any *dosage*. The nose jumps from the glass in a complex and stylish blend of peach, *patissière*, gentle smokiness, beautifully complex soil tones and all those delicate floral tones one finds in pinot meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent soil signature, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. A lovely wine, but it does not have quite the length of the last iteration of this bottling I tasted two years ago (probably due to the influence of the 2011 component in the blend). It is quite tasty today, but will be even better with another year in bottle and should age beautifully. 2016-2030+. **91.**

**Jean Milan “Spécial” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Oger) Disg: June 2015**

The Champagne Jean Milan Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV is a blend of fifty percent 2012 and fifty percent 2011, with the wine having spent three years aging *sur latte*, with the *vins clairs* having gone fully thorough malo. The nose offers up a lovely blend of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, fresh almond and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with fine mineral drive, slightly coarse *mousse*, brisk acids and impressive length and grip on the rock solid finish. This is still a fairly young wine, and without the buffer of higher *dosage*, it really could use some time in the cellar to soften up a bit structurally. This is not the most elegant rendition of Blanc de Blancs, but there is depth and backend conviction here. 2017-2030+. **90+.**

**Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs Gr. Cru Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger) Disg: May 2015**

The Moncuit Grand Cru bottling of Extra Brut is exactly the same base wine as the Brut non-vintage bottling, but with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter instead of the seven grams of the Brut. This is from the base year of 2012 and was disgorged a couple months later than the Brut,

but offers up the same superb depth and purity on the nose, with scents of pear, lemon, beautiful floral tones, fresh almond, chalky minerality, brioche and just a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, very good mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the focused and youthfully complex finish. This is a superb example of Extra Brut, but for drinking this year, I like the way the extra *dosage* of the Brut version buffers the acids a bit better and allows more structurally generosity out of the blocks. 2016-2030+. **91+**.

**Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Atavique” Extra Brut Réserve NV (Verzy) Disg: October 2015**

The current release of l’Atavique from Sébastien Mouzon is from the base year of 2012 and is composed of a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay. This year, a quarter of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented and the wine was again finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter (as was the case with last year’s version). The wine is still fairly tightly-knit on both the nose and palate, but with a little coaxing offers up a fine nose of lemon, tart apple, steely minerality, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and racy in personality, with fine mid-palate depth, crisp acids, impeccable *mousse* and fine cut and lift on the long and nascently complex finish. This is tasty today, but will be so much better once it has had a chance to blossom with a bit more bottle age. 2018-2035. **92**.



**Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Ineffable” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV (Verzy) Disg: July 2015**

Sébastien Mouzon’s current release of his one hundred percent pinot noir-based Blanc de Noirs is comprised of eighty-five percent base year 2011 and fifteen percent from the 2010 vintage, with fully fifty percent of the *vins clairs* fermented in *barriques* this year. This is now the third release of this bottling, which seems to get incrementally better with each iteration. The *dosage* this year is infinitesimal, at one half of one gram per liter of residual sugar, so this is virtually a Brut Zero. The bouquet is flat out superb, wafting from the glass in a blaze of apple, fresh-baked bread, a beautiful base of soil tones, gentle smokiness and an exotic touch of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and superbly balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant and very refined finish. Despite the very minimal *dosage* here, the backend is seamless and utterly suave. 2016-2035. **92+**.

**Franck Pascal “Reliance” Brut Nature NV (Baslieux-sous-Châtillon) Disgorged July 2015**

The current release of the non-vintage Franck Pascal “Reliance” Brut Nature is from the base year of 2011 and comprised of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot meunier, twenty-five percent pinot noir and five percent chardonnay. Like all of Monsieur Pascal’s wines, they are fermented with indigenous yeasts and the *vins clairs* do not go through malo. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, lemon, an exotic touch of menthol, salty minerality and a topnote of wild flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core of fruit, lovely backend mineral drive, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. One can sense the ripe fruit and low yields here, as the acids are beautifully buffered with absolutely no *dosage*. Impressive juice. 2016-2030. **92**.

**Ponson “la Petite Montagne” Premier Cru Extra Brut NV (Coulommès la Montagne)**

The “la Petite Montagne” non-vintage Extra Brut bottling is the first release from young Maxime Ponson. The *cépages* on this cuvée is thirty percent chardonnay, twenty percent pinot meunier, twenty percent pinot noir and thirty percent reserve wines; the bottling was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The bouquet is bright and stylish, offering up scents of apple, tangerine, white flowers, bread dough and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and crisp, with frothy *mousse*, good focus and grip and a long finish. Good juice that augurs very well for the future. 2016-2030. **90**.

***Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut***

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

**Disgorged June 2015**

I have to say that I feel pretty comfortable reading Champagne labels these days, but this bottling had my curiosity engaged, as the neck label says “Premier Cru”, the main and back labels say “Grand Cru” for the wine. In any case, whether or not is the same wine as below, it was disgorged a year later. The bouquet offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, fresh almond, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still fairly primary, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and good, but not great length on the finish. This definitely seems like a different base wine to me than the wine below, but the labeling I do find a bit confusing! 2016-2025. **89**.

**Pierre Callot “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Avize)**

**Disgorged July 2014**

As I noted last summer, Monsieur Callot’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is made from fruit from the domaine’s vineyards in Avize, Cramant and Chouilly, with the *vins clairs* fermented in stainless steel and the wine aged twenty-eight months *sur latte* prior to

disgorgement. The current release from the base year of 2011, which is the same as I tasted a year ago. With the additional year in the bottle, the wine delivers a fine and utterly classic Blanc de Blancs bouquet of delicious apple, pear, *crème patissière*, a touch of toasted almond, a fine base of limestone soil and a gentle topnote of smokiness. 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 long, pure and now wide open finish. This was a bit tight last year, but with the extra year of bottle age, it has blossomed beautifully and is now drinking with style and grace. 2016-2025+. **91.**

**Gaston Chiquet “Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ” Grand Cru Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Feb. 2015**

Last year’s version of Nicolas Chiquet’s rare Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ was from the challenging base year of 2011, so I have been looking forward to trying the new iteration from the far more civilized growing season of 2012. The wine is aged *sur latte* for three years and offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, gentle smokiness, white flowers and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and shows lovely mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and well-balanced finish. Good juice that should really blossom with three or four more years in the cellar. 2016-2030+. **91.**

**Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Sélection Belles Années” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Cuis)**

The current release of “Sélection Belles Années” Blanc de Blancs from Didier Gimonnet was disgorged in September of 2015. This wine is raised entirely in stainless steel and spends more than forty months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, making this bottling from the base year of 2011. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of pear, delicious apple, a touch of fresh nutmeg, chalky soil tones, almond and brioche. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and frothy, with good depth at the core, bright acids and sneaky length and grip on the *aperitif* weight finish. This is tasty out of the blocks and clearly has the spine of acidity to carry it nicely for another ten to twelve years. 2016-2028+. **89.**

**Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Cuis” 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Cuis) Disg 10/15**

The new release of the Cuvée Cuis from Pierre Gimonnet et Fils is from the base year of 2012, as this bottling is aged two and a half years on its fine lees. The nose is a youthful blend of apple, pear, lemon peel, sweet almond, fresh-baked bread and chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nascently complex, with a good core, rather coarse *mousse*, brisk acids and solid length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Like last year’s release, this is pretty youthful out of the blocks and really could do with some bottle age to start to drink with generosity and offer more complexity, but there are some good, solid raw materials here. This is the entry level bottling from the Gimonnets and it is perfectly respectable, but not exciting in the context of their other wines. 2016-2025. **87.**

**Philippe Gonet “Signature” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The current release of the Gonet family’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a lovely bottle of Blanc de Blancs cut in the *aperitif* style. The wine was aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and offers up a bright and classy nose of pear, almond, pastry cream, a nice touch of chalky soil and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and vibrant, with good, but not great depth at the core, fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and lovely bounce on the poised and complex finish. I really like the high-toned personality of this bottling, which is light on its feet and has plenty of charm. 2016-2030. **90.**



**Philippe Gonet “Roy Soleil” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

Philippe Gonet’s “Roy Soleil” Blanc de Blancs was first produced in 2003 and is made entirely from fruit in the family’s vineyards in their grand cru home base of Mesnil-sur-Oger. Thirty percent of the *vins clairs* are raised in cask, with twenty-five percent new, and the remainder raised in tank. The wine spends a minimum of forty-eight months aging *sur latte* and offers up a deep and classy nose of pear, *crème patissière*, spring flowers, just a touch of oak influence, almond and a complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, lovely, nascent complexity, pinpoint bubbles and a long, snappy and well-balanced finish. This has more weight than many of the Gonet cuvées that I sampled for this report and really is a lovely bottle, with the potential to blossom even further with additional bottle age. Fine juice. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**Gosset “Grand Blanc de Blancs” Brut NV (Épernay)**

**Disgorged June 2015**

The newest release of Gosset “Grand Blanc de Blancs” is really superb on both the nose and palate. It is a blend of 2010 and 2009 vintage wines, spent four years aging on its fine lees and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The deep and complex bouquet offers up a very refined constellation of pear, fresh almond, brioche, a touch of the *crème patissière* to come, chalky minerality, white lilies and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, brisk acids, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is delicious to drink today, but it is still a young wine and will age effortlessly. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

**Champagne Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges)**

**Disgorged May 2015**

The current release of the Grongnet non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2011, as this is the same wine that I sampled in Reims last spring, but disgorged three months later. Two-thirds of the *vins clairs* for this bottling are barrel-fermented, with the other third in stainless steel and the wines do not go through malo. This bottling was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, but seems drier in personality, due to the *vins clairs* not going through malolactic. The bouquet has really blossomed beautifully since last spring, offering up a blend of lime, pear, a touch of *crème patissière*, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the long and refined finish. All of the Grongnet family’s vineyards face due south here, but as the wine does not go through malo, there retains lovely structural tension. Really a high class bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs! 2016-2030. **92.**

**Champagne Henriot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)**

The new release of Henriot’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is a lovely wine and I really wish that the house would adopt some of the practices of its neighbors in providing more information on the back label or in the technical sheets in terms of date of disgorgement and amount of time aging *sur latte*. The wine was aged a minimum of three years on its lees, but it may have spent as long as five years, and includes thirty percent reserve wines. This information is as precise as I could come up with regarding the new release. The wine offers up a lovely and classic nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, brioche, fresh almond, lovely, chalky soil tones and incipient notes of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, classy and quite wide open finish. This is lovely. 2016-2030+. **91.**

**Champagne Henriot “Cuve 38” V-2 Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)**

The second release of Champagne Henriot’s “Cuve 38” is another stunning bottle of bubbly and not surprisingly, very similar to last year’s magical inaugural release. The wine is

comprised of a solera blend from the 1990 through the 2009 vintage, with the V-2 having been drawn off in 2010 and aged for five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and preparation for release. The *dosage* of the V-2 is a touch lower than the first release at 3.5 grams per liter, but the innate creamy sweetness of the older elements in the solera leaves this wine impeccably balanced at its low sugar level and does not seem really like an Extra Brut. The wine is superb aromatically, offering up a superb blend of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a beautifully complex base of soil tones, incipient notes of *crème patissière*, orange blossoms and a very gentle base of leesy undertow. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really very fresh and youthful in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, outstanding focus and grip, very elegant *mousse*, impeccable structural elements and a very, very long, complex and vibrant finish. As was the case with the first iteration of Cuve 38, there are only a thousand magnums drawn off of the tank for the bottling of the V-2, so the wine will take some effort to find in the market, but it will be well worth the effort. Despite this wine being composed from a solera started in 1990, this is a youthful wine that is just starting out its journey in bottle and will not reach its apogee for another five to ten years and should drink splendidly for at least three decades. Another stunning effort from Henriot! 2016-2045+. **96.**

**Lanson “Extra Age” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)**

**Disgorged November 2012**

The new release of Lanson’s “Extra Age” Blanc de Blancs remains a blend from the vintages of 2003, 2004 and 2005, but was disgorged ten months later than the bottle reported upon at this time last year. As I noted then, this cuvée spends more than five years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement, and has now seen three and a half years of bottle age after its disgorgement. The wine offers up an excellent nose of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones, smoke and a topnote of pastry cream. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and absolutely *à point* in its evolution, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, frothy *mousse* and lovely cut and grip on the very long, complex and classy finish. A lovely wine. 2016-2035. **92+.**

**Pierre Moncuit “Hugues de Coulmet” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil) Disg: Dec. 2015**

The Pierre Moncuit Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet comes from the family’s five hectares of vines in Sézanne (southwest of Vertus), rather than their grand cru parcels in Mesnil sur Oger. As I noted last year, this cuvée undergoes complete malo, is raised entirely in stainless steel and has a *dosage* of 9 grams per liter. This year’s release is from the base year of 2012, as the wine spent two and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a classic blend of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, chalky minerality and white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and light on its feet, with bright acids, elegant *mousse*, a good core and fine length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is very easy to drink today, but it is still a young wine and will be even better if tucked away in the cellar for a couple of years and really allowed to blossom. A lovely wine. 2016-2030. **90+.**

**Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger) Disg: March 2015**

My literature on this wine says that it is from the base year of 2012, which would mean that it spent two and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in March of last year. As readers will recall, this is all fruit from the family’s vineyards in Mesnil and the wine is finished off this year with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is absolutely superb, showing more depth than the lovely Cuvée Hugues de Coulmet is its aromatic constellation of ripe pears, lemon oil, fresh almond, vanilla pastry cream, chalky soil tones and a discreet topnote of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a great mid-palate amplitude, refined *mousse*, beautifully-integrated acids, great balance and a very

long, elegant and complex finish. Beautiful wine, with a bit more *gravitas* than the Hugues de Coulmet bottling. 2016-2035+. **92+**.

**Champagne Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs “Réserve Privée” Brut NV (Reims)**

The current release of Bruno Paillard’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs “Réserve Privée” was disgorged in July of 2014. What I did not know until Alice Paillard’s recent visit to New York to show this wine was that the house bottles this wine for its secondary fermentation using a technique known as *Demi Mousse*, which uses a bit less sugar and yeast so that the pressure is a touch less than in the other Paillard bottlings (4.5 kilos versus a customary five to six), as this makes the more taught structure of a younger Blanc de Blancs a bit gentler out of the blocks. As is always the case, this bottling is made entirely from grand cru fruit and offers up a superb nose of par, lemon, chalky minerality, bread dough and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite primary in personality, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a very long, refined and vibrant finish. This is certainly approachable today, but I would tuck it away in the cellar and give it at least a couple of years bottle age to allow it to unwind and really blossom. 2018-2040. **93**.

**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 January of 2016 and includes forty percent reserve wines, which hail from the domaine’s solera, started circa 1988. This version is primarily base year 2013 and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of just over six grams per liter. The wine offers up a youthful blend of lemon, apple, a nice, exotic touch of menthol, chalky minerality, lime blossoms and bread dough. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely high-toned, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, fine backend mineral drive and a long, nascently complex finish. This is not particularly classic, but I really like its bounce and impressive length on the backend. It may become more typical of Mesnil with some bottle age, but it is very nicely balanced and quite easy to drink in its idiosyncratic youth. 2016-2030+. **91**.

**Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)**

The current release of Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut is fermented in stainless steel, goes through full malolactic and was finished off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright blend of lemon, apple, warm bread, a touch of smokiness, dried flowers and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with brisk acids, frothy *mousse*, good cut and grip and a long, still fairly youthful finish. This has plenty of acidity, so its *dosage* comes across as lower than its nine grams. This will have no difficulty aging gracefully, but is already quite tasty. 2016-2035. **91+**.

***Non-Vintage Brut and Blanc de Noirs***

**L. Aubry Fils “Premier Cru” Brut NV (Jouy-les-Reims)**

**Disgorged December 2015**

The new release of non-vintage Brut from L. Aubry Fils is base year 2012, with half of the blend hailing from their solera of reserve wines that the family began in the 1998 vintage. As has been the case for several years with this bottling, the blend 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 bright and complex, with a touch of exotica poking through from the inclusion of Arbanne and Petit Meslier, as it offers up a mélange of apple, peach, a dollop of fresh coconut, chalky soil tones, bread dough and plenty of delicate floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and youthfully zesty, with

a fine core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and lovely length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This was aged a bit more than two and a half years *sur latte* and is still a pretty young wine, but it is quite tasty today and will age very nicely. 2016-2030. **90+**.



**L. Aubry Fils “Le Nombre d’Or” Brut NV (Jouey-lès-Reims)      Disgorged August 2015**

The current non-vintage release of Le Nombre d’Or from Aubry Fils is composed of a unique *cépages* of twenty-five percent Fromenteau and Pinot Blanc, twenty percent each of Petit Meslier and Arbanne, twenty percent Pinot Noir, ten percent Chardonnay and five percent Pinot Meunier. All of the *vins clairs* go through full malo and the wine aged more than four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of peach, gentle nutskin, complex soil tones, dried flowers, *patissière* and just a hint of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and mineral driven, with an excellent core, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and well-balanced finish. This is loaded with personality and a fine bottle that is imminently drinkable today, but will be even better once the acids soften up a tad on the backend and the wine really blossoms. 2016-2030. **91+**.

**Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut Réserve NV (Gyé sur Seine)**

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. The current release is base year 2011, with again, five percent of the blend from

the preceding year. The wine was disgorged in October of 2015 and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet offers up lovely floral elements in its constellation of apple, lime blossoms, flinty minerality, bread dough and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with beautiful balance, refined *mousse*, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long, pure and dancing finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Aube bubbly! 2016-2035. **92+**.

**Champagne Baron-Fuenté “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Charly-sur-Marne)**

Baron-Fuenté’s non-vintage Brut bottling is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir, with all the *vins clairs* all fermented in stainless steel. It is a full malo wine and is aged three years *sur latte*, being finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. I am not sure if this is the same release I reported on last year or a new cuvée, but the wine is showing very well. The bouquet offers up a fine constellation of white peach, apple, lovely meunier floral tones, a touch of *patissière*, lovely minerality and a hint of lemon zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, a fine sense of bounce, elegant *mousse* and lovely cut and grip on the seamless and classy finish. Fine juice, with plenty of pinot meunier delicacy in evidence on the palate. 2016-2030. **90+**.

**Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut NV (Épernay)**

The new release of the Besserat de Bellefon non-vintage Brut was disgorged in September of 2015. The *cépages* is forty-five percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir and spent three years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is bright and complex, jumping from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, delicious apple, fresh-baked bread, fine minerality and plenty of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and youthfully complex, with a fine girdle of acidity, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, very well-balanced finish. This has lovely structure for aging, but the lower pressure here also makes it very easy to drink in its relative youth. Good juice. 2016-2035. **91**.

**Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut NV (Épernay)**

The non-vintage Blanc de Noirs from Besserat de Bellefon was disgorged a tad later than the non-vintage Brut, in October of 2015, and this bottling is comprised entirely of pinot noir and hailing from the base year of 2012. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter and offers up a fine and discreet nose of apple, tart orange, lovely minerality, white flowers and a bit of *patissière*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still quite youthful in personality, with a good core, lovely *mousse* and fine length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but another year or two in the bottle will really allow it to blossom out from behind its structure. 2016-2030. **90+**.

**H. Billiot Fils “Brut Réserve” Grand Cru NV (Ambonnay)**

**Disgorged June 2015**

Serge Billiot’s Brut Réserve is always a blend of at least seventy-five percent pinot noir, with the balance of the blend made up of chardonnay. The new release is a young wine on both the nose and palate, but with depth at the core and fine structural elements to allow it to blossom very nicely with a bit of bottle age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, a hint of the *patissière* to come, stony minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary, with brisk acids, a fine core, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the youthful finish. This is certainly drinkable today, but it is still really a youthful wine and another year or two in the cellar should really pay dividends. 2018-2030+. **90+**.

**Chartogne-Taillet “Cuvée Sainte Anne” Brut (Merfy)****Disgorged February 2016**

The new release of Alexandre Chartogne’s Cuvée Sainte Anne bottling hails from several different *lieux à dits* in Merfy and is made up this year of a blend of thirty-five percent chardonnay and sixty-five percent pinot noir. The base year is 2013, with forty percent from the 2012 vintage. This release of Sainte Anne was finished off with a *dosage* of five and a half grams per liter. The wine offers up a simply superb bouquet of apple, white peach, lovely, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a touch of gentle nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, great soil signature, very refined *mousse* and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This is still a young wine, but it is already drinking with plenty of style and will only get better with further bottle age. *Chapeau!* 2016-2030+. **92+**.

**Gaston Chiquet “Brut Tradition” NV (Dizy)****Disgorged January 2015**

The Gaston Chiquet “Brut Tradition” is composed of a mix of forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir, with the current release from the base year of 2010. This particularly bottling was disgorged six months later than the wine I tasted last year, so saw nearly four years aging on its fine lees. The wine delivers fine aromatic precision in its mélange of white peach, apple, lovely soil tones, a touch of *patissière*, dried flowers and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and generous on the attack, with a fine spine of acidity, slightly larger bubbles, good focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. I like this wine quite a bit now and suspect it will be even tastier with another year or two in the cellar. 2016-2030. **90+**.

**Paul Clouët “Brut Grand Cru” NV (Bouzy)****Disgorged November 2014**

The new release of the Paul Clouët non-vintage “Brut Sélection” is from the base year of 2011 and is made of its traditional cépages of eighty percent pinot noir from Bouzy and twenty percent chardonnay from Chouilly. The blend was finished this year with touch more reserve wine than customary (twenty percent this year), to give a bit more depth to the 2011 juice. The wine spends thirty-six months *sur latte* and was finished this year with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. As is not standard for this wine, it also spends another six months in the cellars recovering from its disgorgement prior to release into the market. The new bottling is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine base of soil and a dollop of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the classy finish. A classic Bouzy Brut. 2016-2030. **91**.

**Paul Clouët “Cuvée Prestige” Brut NV (Bouzy)**

As I noted last year, after my visit to the estate, 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 an extended period of time aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and release into the market. Amazingly, the new release is from the base year of 2002, with the reserve wines from 2001 and 2000. This is really a beautiful wine today, having just reached its apogee of peak drinkability and offering lovely secondary layers in its bouquet of tangerine, apple, *patissière*, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a nice topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open in personality, with lovely mid-palate amplitude, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the beautifully balanced and complex finish. 2016-2030. **92+**.

### **Champagne Corbon “Anthracite” Brut NV (Avize)**

As I mentioned when visiting the estate last year, the base wine for the Anthracite Brut and the Absolutement Brut is exactly the same, with the sole difference being that the Anthracite Brut is finished off with a *dosage* of six grams this year, as opposed to zero *dosage* for the other bottling. However, the Anthracite is a bit ahead of the Absolutement Brut in the marketplace, so this bottling hails from the base year of 2010, rather than the '08 for the Absolutement. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of apple, pear, bread dough, fresh almond, chalky soil and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with an excellent core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and superb balance on the long, youthfully pure finish. Fine juice that is eminently approachable today, but will be even better (like all Corbon wines) with further bottle age. 2016-2035+. **92.**

### **R. H. Coutier “Cuvée Tradition” Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged May 2015**

The R. H. Coutier non-vintage “Cuvée Tradition” is currently in the base year of 2012, having spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. It is finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and is comprised of its customary blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. The bouquet is deep and pure, wafting from the glass in a mélange of apple, *patissière*, a fine base of gently chalky soil tones, a touch of nutskin, brioche and dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and youthfully zesty, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a long, intense and still fairly primary finish. This is of course a fine drink right out of the blocks, but it is built to age in the classic Ambonnay style and will be even better four or five years down the road. High class bubbly. 2016-2035. **92.**

### **Dehours et Fils “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Cerseuil)**

This was the first round of wines that I have tasted from Jérôme Dehours and I was quite impressed, who is based in the village of Cerseuil in the start of the Marne Valley, due north of Festigny. The Grande Réserve bottling is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir and includes a quarter reserve wines, which come from a solera started in 1988. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and offers up a lovely bouquet of white peach, stony minerality, lilacs, fresh-baked bread and gentle, pinot meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and quite classy, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is a lovely bottle that really shows its pinot meunier component to fine effect. 2016-2030. **91.**

### **Champagne Drappier “Carte d’Or” Brut NV (Urville)**

The Carte d’Or bottling of Brut non-vintage from Drappier is a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir, fifteen percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot meunier. The wine undergoes full malolactic fermentation, with five percent of the blend raised in Burgundy barrels and is finished with a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The current release is really quite lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, *patissière*, a touch of almond, beautiful Aube flinty limestone and fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a very good core of fruit, fine mineral drive pinpoint bubbles, still fairly youthful acidity and very good length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. There is no information on date of disgorgement for this bottling, but I would guess that this is base year 2011 (which is far better in the Aube than further north) or 2012. This is still a tad on the young side and will be even better with a bit of bottle age, and given its excellent structure, this is a fine



candidate for tucking away in the cellar for five to seven years and really allowing the wine to blossom. 2017-2030+. **91.**

**Duval-Leroy “Premier Cru” Brut NV (Vertus)**

The current release of Duval-Leroy’s non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir and spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a fine nose of apple, pear, lovely minerality, a nice touch of smokiness, warm biscuits and just a whisper of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, vibrant acids and fine focus and grip on the long and well-balanced finish. There seems to be just a whisper of oak influence on the backend. 2016-2035. **91.**

**Champagne Fleury Brut NV (Courteron)**

Jean-Pierre Fleury began converting the family’s vineyards in the Aube to biodynamic farming all the way back in 1989 and today their entire fifteen hectare vineyard patrimony is certified as such. They grow ninety percent pinot noir on their estate, with the balance of the vines planted to chardonnay. The new release of the Champagne Fleury non-vintage Brut is primarily pinot noir and offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, flinty minerality, bread dough, gentle smokiness and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and really nicely balanced, with fine depth at the core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and very good length and grip on the finish. I could not find information on the *dosage* for this bottling, but I would guess it is in the four to five grams range. Good juice. 2016-2030. **90+.**

**Gatinois “Brut Tradition” NV (Aÿ) Disgorged July 2015**

The current rendition of Gatinois “Brut Tradition” is primarily base year 2011, with roughly a third of the blend reserve wines and is composed of its customary *cépages* of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. In my experience, this is consistently fine and the new release is another classic example of Aÿ pinot noir, as it jumps from the glass in a complex and almost meaty mix of apple, white peach, *patissière*, lovely soil tones, a touch of walnut and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with frothy *mousse*, beautiful focus and balance, a lovely core and outstanding length and grip on the poised and classic finish. This has the broad shoulders of Aÿ, coupled with marvelous freshness and bounce. Classy juice. 2016-2030. **92.**

**Champagne Geoffroy “Brut Expression” Premier Cru NV (Aÿ) Disgorged June 2015**

The new release of Brut Expression from Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy is from the base year of 2011, with thirty-five percent of the *cuvée vin reserve* from 2010. The blend this year is thirty-five percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir, with thirty percent chardonnay. This is a rather unique bottling of this wine, as nearly twenty percent of the *vins clairs* went through malo this year, which is quite atypical. The wine was aged thirty months *sur latte*. The nose offers up a refined blend of apple, white peach, lovely soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a gentle topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fairly high-toned palate impression, but a good core. The *mousse* is quite elegant and the wine is long and nicely balanced, with bright acids and very good length and grip on the finish. This is very successful for the difficult vintage of 2011. 2016-2025. **90.**

**Philippe Gonet “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The current offering of Gonet “Grande Réserve” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot meunier and was aged for three years *sur latte*. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and delivers a fine bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil tones, a touch of

citrus zest and delicate spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and elegant, with fine *mousse*, good, but not great depth at the core and pretty good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. Like many of the Gonet wines that I tasted for this report, this is a fine middleweight that is cut in the perfect mold for *aperitif* services. 2016-2026+. **88+**.

**Henri Goutorbe “Cuvée Prestige” Premier Cru Brut NV (Aÿ) Disgorged April 2014**

This the same disgorgement date and cuvée of the wine I reported on a year ago. The *cépages* is seventy percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier and has been aged *sur latte* for three years, making this release base year 2010. Last year, the *dosage* seemed a bit overly generous to my palate, and this remains the case with a year of further bottle age. The wine has good depth, soil signature and length on the backend, but it seems a bit overly simple with its generous sweetening. The bouquet is a mix of peach, brioche, lovely soil tones and a discreet floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and fairly simple, with a good core, fairly large bottles and an overly sweet finish that is not particularly clean. I had hoped a year in the bottle would have helped this a bit, but this does not seem to be the case. 2016-2025. **86.**

**Marc Hébrart “Brut Sélection” Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged Sept. 2015**

The iteration of Jean-Paul Hébrart’s non-vintage “Brut Sélection” bottling is once again made up of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* all go through full malo and the wine is aged *sur latte* fully four years prior to disgorgement. The wine is from the base year of 2010 (with twenty-five percent of the blend from the previous two years) and delivers a refined bouquet of apple, white peach, a gentle touch of nutmeg, *patissière*, complex soil tones, gentle nuttiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovey focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the classy finish. This is lovely juice that is wide open today, but will continue to drink well for many years to come. 2016-2030. **91+**.

**Marc Hébrart “Cuvée de Réserve” Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disg. June 2015**

The new release of Jean-Paul Hébrart’s Cuvée de Réserve bottling of non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2012, with forty-eight percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines from the previous two vintages. As is customary, it 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. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet of apple, a touch of peach, complex minerality, a touch of smokiness, sourdough and white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, again (as was the case last year with this cuvée) slightly larger bubbles, good acids and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is still on the young side and will be even better with a bit of bottle age, but there is stuffing and length here this year! 2017-2030+. **90+**.

**Charles Heidsieck “Brut Réserve” NV (Reims)**

**Disgorged 2015**

The current release of Charles Heidsieck “Brut Réserve” is from the base year of 2007 and includes fully forty percent reserve wines in the blend. It spent seven years aging *sur latte* and is comprised of a blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. The bouquet is deep, pure and refined, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones, gentle nuttiness and a discreet topnote of browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows lovely secondary layers of complexity, with superb mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a very long, very pure and classy finish. I love the synthesis of bright structural aspects and the patina of age on both the nose and palate here. High class juice. 2016-2030. **92+**.



### **Champagne Henriot “Brut Souverain” NV (Reims)**

The new release of Brut Souverain from Henriot is really lovely, with a sense of early generosity that is quite attractive. This is from the weaker base year of 2011, but *Chef de Cave* Laurent Fresnet compensated with a bit higher percentage of reserve wines to keep the quality at its customary level and the result is excellent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open and vibrant blend of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a touch of lemon peel and bread dough. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the racy finish. This cuvée was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter this year and the balance is impeccable. 2016-2030. **91.**

### **Benoît Lahaye “Brut Essential” NV (Bouzy)**

Benoît Lahaye’s “Brut Essential” is one of my favorite pinot noir-dominated non-vintage bottlings currently on the market. The cuvée is composed of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, spends two and a half years aging on its fine lees, is bottled without filtration and is finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The new release is outstanding, offering up a beautifully pure bouquet of apple, peach, *patissière*, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core of fruit, lovely *mousse* and a very long, focused and classy finish. This is very high class juice. 2016-2030+. **92+.**

**Jean Lallement et Fils “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Verzenay)****Disgorged July 2014**

The Jean Lallement et Fils non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. The wine is made from Monsieur Lallement's younger vines in Verzenay and Verzy (he also has a small parcel of vines in the village of Ludes). The base year is 2011 of the current release, with twenty percent of the blend from the 2010 vintage. The wine is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel, with the wine going through malo. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, bread dough, steely minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered in personality, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a long, youthfully brisk finish. This wine should age nicely and seems still a bit on the young side for primetime drinking. 2017-2030. **89+**.

**Jean Lallement et Fils “Cuvée Réserve” Brut NV (Verzenay)****Disgorged July 2015**

The Jean Lallement et Fils “Cuvée Réserve” non-vintage Brut is made from the same vineyards as his non-vintage Brut, but from the older vines, so that all of the fruit that goes into this cuvée are from vines that are at least thirty years of age. The *cépages* is eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* going through malolactic fermentation. The wine was aged five years *sur latte*, making this base year 2009. The wine offers up a deep and serious nose of apple, white peach, the steely soil tones of Verzenay, white flowers, fresh-baked bread and a hint of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and racy, with superb depth at the core, brisk acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, minerally and still quite youthful finish. This is built to age and is going to be an excellent bottle with a bit of cellaring, but it is still very early days and I would not hesitate to tuck this fine wine away for three or four years and let it really blossom. 2020-2035+. **91+**.

**Lamiable “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Tours-sur-Marne)**

The new release of Lamiable's non-vintage Brut is composed of its customary *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* fermented in older casks and the wine spending eighteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The back label does not have any disgorgement date on it, so I do not know what the base year is for this wine. The bouquet is bright and stylish, offering up scents of apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, a touch of citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with elegant *mousse*, lovely balance and very good, if not great length on the classy finish. Another fine Brut NY from Lamiable. 2016-2025. **90+**.

**Lanson “Black Label” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged December 2015**

The current release of Lanson “Black Label” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and fifteen percent pinot meunier and spent thirty months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, and then another six months in the cellar before being released into the market. The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, offering up a fine bouquet of apple, bread dough, fine, gently salty minerality, a touch of lemon peel and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and a long, vibrant finish. This is really a lovely version of Black Label and it should continue to drink nicely for a couple of decades, though it is already quite accessible and drinking with plenty of style. 2016-2035. **91**.

**Lanson “Black Label” Brut NV Magnum (Reims)****Disgorged June 2012**

Lanson always makes Champagne that ages very, very well, and this includes their non-vintage Brut “Black Label”. The magnums of this bottling are always older than the regular-sized bottles, as is witnessed by this magnum, which is the current in the American market,

which was disgorged fully two and a half years earlier than the 750 ml. version. This magnum spent five years aging *sur latte* (or double the length of the 750) and is from the base year of 2006. With age, the wine opens up so nicely on the palate, while staying fresh on the nose, with the bouquet of this magnum offering up a lovely blend of apple, pit fruits, *pain grillé*, salty soil tones, lemon peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and frothy, with a lovely core, fine complexity and focus, bright acids and lovely length on the classy finish. Fine juice and one of the great bargains in the market. 2016-2030. **92.**

**Lanson “Extra Age” Brut NV (Reims)**

**Disgorged March 2013**

The current release of Lanson “Extra Age” Brut continues to be a blend of the 2000, 2002 and 2004 vintages, with this most recent edition disgorged in March of 2013. The pinot noir in the blend hails from the Montagne de Reims villages of Verzenay and Bouzy and the chardonnay from the Côte de Blancs villages of Avize, Vertus, Chouilly and Oger. This is the same disgorgement I reported on a year ago, with the benefit of another year in the bottle. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, peach, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a nice topnote of sweet spices. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and shows lovely secondary layers of complexity, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a long, classy and *à point* finish. This is now at its apogee, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. Fine juice. 2016-2035. **92+.**

**Champagne Lombard et Cie “Tanagra” Grand Cru Brut NV (Épernay)**

**Disg: Nov 2015**

The Tanagra bottling is the Lombard family’s *Tête de Cuvée*. The bottling is a blend of all grand crus, with fifty percent chardonnay from Mesnil-sur-Oger, thirty percent chardonnay from Chouilly and twenty percent pinot noir from Verzenay. The wine is *non-dosé*, despite it being labeled as a Brut and is from the base year of 2009, having spent five and a half years aging *sur latte*. Ten percent of the *vins clairs* were aged one year in six hundred liter casks prior to the blend being made and the wine being bottled for its aging *sur latte*. The current release offers up a deep and refined nose of pear, delicious apple, chalky minerality, *crème patissière*, fresh nutmeg and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite tightly-knit, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This is certainly quite delicious today, but it will be even better with three or four years in the cellar to fully blossom. Impressive juice. 2018-2030+. **92.**

**Arnaud Margaine “le Brut” Premier Cru NV (Villers-Marmery)**

**Disg: October 2015**

As I noted last year, knowing that Monsieur Margaine grows primarily chardonnay in his vineyards (ninety percent), I assume that this cuvée is principally chardonnay, but I could not find any information on the web to confirm this. Given the date of disgorgement, I assume that this is base year 2012, but this is just assumption and this could also be a later disgorgement of the same base wine I tasted last year. Most of the *vins clairs* for this bottling do not go through malolactic fermentation. The wine today offers up a lovely nose of pear, white peach, chalky soil tones, a touch of pastry cream and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully light on its feet, with respectable depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and very good grip and solid length on the youthfully complex finish. This is a stylish, aperitif weight bottle that is very easy to drink. 2016-2025. **90.**

**Moët et Chandon Brut Imperial NV (Épernay)**

**Early 1990’s Release**

I came across this bottle of Moët et Chandon Brut Imperial in a cellar of petits châteaux Bordeaux a few months ago and the owner felt she had bought the wine around the same time as her 1989 claret. The wine has aged very nicely and is still a fine, light golden color. The bright bouquet is complex and nicely tertiary, offering up scents of dried apple, walnut, smoke, orange

peel, wheat toast and dusty soil tones. On the palate the wine is mature, full-bodied and still shows a good touch of *mousse*, with fine depth at the core, sound acids and good balance on the long and gently sweet finish. *Dosage* levels back in this era were far more generous than is the custom today, and this shows a bit on the backend, but all in all, this wine has aged very well and is probably a better drink today, nearly a quarter century on from its release, than it was when it was the current bottling in the market. 2015-2025+. **88.**

**Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Buxeuil) Disgorged January 2016**

The current release of Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” is its typical one hundred percent pinot noir and is from the base year of 2012. I love the combination of this wine’s classic, Chablis-like, Aube *terroir* and its non-malo, pinot noir personality, as this is not something one is going to replicate in Chablis proper! The new release was finished with a *dosage* of ten grams per liter, which might have been adjusted down just a touch, given the really lovely generosity of fruit of the 2012 vintage, but the wine is still singing at the present time. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, offering up scents of white peach, *patissière*, gentle smokiness, beautifully complex limestone minerality, a touch of orange peel and gentle floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully poised and balanced, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, great focus and grip on the very long, very elegant finish. A beautiful bottle of Champagne and a great value. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**Champagne Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged April 2015**

I am a long-time admirer of the Paillard family’s bottling of Première Cuvée and have quite a few examples aging comfortably in my cellar, as I find this one of the longest-lived non-vintage bottlings. In my experience, most new releases of this wine start out life a bit tightly-knit and in need of a bit of cellaring, but this most recent release was absolutely singing when tasted in mid-May. The wine is remarkable in that it hails from the difficult 2011 base year, but Alice Paillard noted that more reserve wine was used this year to keep the style and quality at its customary level. The wine this year is a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-three percent chardonnay and twenty-two percent pinot meunier and the wine spent thirty-six months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, and was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex constellation of apple, white peach, *pain grillé*, a superb base of soil, citrus zest and a nice touch of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, outstanding complexity and a very long, crisp and perfectly balanced finish. A superb wine by any stretch of the imagination! 2016-2035+. **93+.**

**Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” Grand Cru Brut NV (Verzenay) Disgorged January 2014**

This is the same bottling of Pehu Simonet “Face Nord” non-vintage Brut that I tasted a year ago. As I noted then, the *cépages* of this cuvée is 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 the wines do not undergo malolactic fermentation. With the additional year of bottle age the bouquet has blossomed nicely to deliver scents of apple, white peach, *patissière*, a fine base of minerality, a touch of caraway seed, gentle nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and lovely soil signature on the long and complex finish. This is a lovely wine. 2016-2030. **91.**

**Piper-Heidsieck Brut NV (Reims)**

As I have noted in recent years, the non-vintage Brut bottling from Piper-Heidsieck has become one of the finest examples of this category from a *Grande Marque* in the last few years

and the new release is again, excellent. The blend this year is comprised of sixty percent pinot noir, twenty-five percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent chardonnay and the wine spent twenty-four months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, quince, a bit of toastiness, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and very good length and grip on the light on its feet finish. I am guessing that this is primarily base year 2011 (despite no date of disgorgement on my tech sheets), as it seems just a bit more high-toned than last year's version. This is really a lovely wine. 2016-2025. **90+**.

**Champagne Bernard Tormay “Carte d’Or” Brut NV (Bouzy)**

Champagne Bernard Tormay is now run by Rudy Hutasse, who took over the direction of this twenty-three hectare Bouzy estate in 1997, following the retirement of his father, Bernard Tormay. Prior to assuming the reins at Champagne Tormay, Monsieur Hutasse worked for seventeen years at Laurent-Perrier. The Carte d’Or bottling is comprised of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, as befits a wine from a top estate in a prime pinot noir village such as Bouzy. The wine includes a minimum of thirty percent reserve wines and fully fifty-five percent of the blend hails from grand cru vineyards in Bouzy and Ambonnay. The *vins clairs* undergo full malo and the bottling was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, after spending three years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet is deep and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, brioche, superb soil tones, a touch of *patissière* and a dollop of gentle spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and classy finish. This is really a lovely bottle of non-vintage Brut! 2016-2035. **92**.

**Varnier-Fannière “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Avize)**

**Disgorged April 2015**

The Varnier-Fannière “Grand Cru” non-vintage Brut is made up entirely of chardonnay, with the blend being that essentially one-third each of the grapes for this cuvée hail from the villages of Avize, Cramant and Oger. The wine spends a bit more than two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, so this is from the base year of 2012. The wine is quite good, offering up a lovely bouquet of apple, white peach, pastry cream, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with good mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse* and good focus on the complex, but ever so slightly shorter finish. This is a very tasty bottle and the only thing that keeps its score down a tad is its slight lack of backend length. But, I would be happy to drink it anytime. 2016-2030. **90**.

**Veuve Clicquot Brut NV (Reims)**

The current release of the Yellow Label non-vintage Brut from Veuve Clicquot is the finest example of this cuvée that I have tasted in many years! There is a precision on both the nose and palate that has been missing from this bottling in the last few iterations that I have tasted, but which jumps from the glass with the new release. The refined nose wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, tart pear, a lovely base of soil, fresh-baked bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, refined *mousse*, lovely focus and a long, vibrant and quite long finish. This is really quite tasty. 2016-2025+. **90**.

**Vilmart et Cie “Grand Cellier” Brut NV (Rilly la Montagne)**

My bottle of the current release of Grand Cellier from Vilmart et Cie did not have the date of disgorgement on the back label, so I am not certain of the base year of this wine. As is customary for this cuvée, the wine is a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent



pinot noir. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a gently oak-influenced mélange of apple, peach, lovely soil tones, brioche and a touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the complex and light on its feet finish. This could very well be the same bottling I tasted a year ago, with a bit of bottle age, as that wine was quite buttoned up behind its girdle of acidity, and this year's sample is bright and bouncy, but wide open and very easy to drink. Fine juice. 2016-2025+. **91+**.

### ***Non-Vintage Brut Rosé***

#### **L. Aubry Fils “Premier Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Jouy-les-Reims) Disgorged November 2015**

The current iteration of L. Aubry Fils non-vintage Brut Rosé hails entirely from the fine 2012 vintage and is composed of a combination of fifty-five percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and fifteen percent pinot meunier. All of the *vins clairs* for this bottling go through full malo, with the chardonnay fermented in older casks and the red grapes in stainless steel. The bouquet is very pretty, wafting from the glass in a mix of melon, white cherries, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and a delicate floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and well-balanced, with a good core, bright acids, slightly larger bubbles and petty good length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. The *mousse* here is not the finest, but the wine does have very good depth and personality. 2016-2025. **88**.



**Champagne Baron-Fuenté “Rosé Dolorès” Brut NV (Charly-sur-Marne)**

The Baron-Fuenté non-vintage “Rosé Dolorès” Brut is comprised of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and twenty percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir, and with its deep salmon color, I assume that some of the red grapes are added as still wine. The bouquet on the current release is lovely and quite spicy in personality, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of blood orange, cherries, cloves, a fine base of soil and wheat toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the complex finish. This is a tad on the young side, but is quite approachable today and will only get better with a year or two in bottle. 2016-2025+. **90+**.

**Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Brut Rosé NV (Épernay) Disgorged April 2014**

The current release of Besserat de Bellefon’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of the same *cépages* as last year’s version: forty percent pinot meunier and thirty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. The wine is aged *sur latte* three years prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is lovely, wafting from the glass in a blend of tangerine, white cherry, discreet smokiness, a lovely base of soil, rye toast and a topnote of gentle spiciness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the zesty and complex finish. As readers will recall, the Besserat bottlings are Crémant styled and the lower pressure allows for really fine drinking in the wines’ collective youth. This is lovely, and I am not sure if it the same bottling I tasted last year with an additional year’s worth of bottle age, or a new release, but the wine is really singing today. 2016-2035. **91+**.

**Chartogne-Taillet “Le Rosé” Brut NV (Merfy)**

**Disgorged December 2015**

The current release of Alexandre Chartogne’s Le Rosé is a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir and hails from the base year of 2011. This is the same bottling I tasted immediately after disgorging when I visited Alexandre last year at the family domaine and the wine is really singing with some distance out from its disgorgement. The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, offering up scents of white cherries, blood orange, a gentle touch of cinnamon, *patissière*, lovely soil tones and a topnote of distant smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and seamlessly balanced, with superb depth at the core, frothy *mousse*, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the classy finish. This is showing even better today than it did at the domaine and I clearly underrated the wine then! 2016-2030. **92+**.

**Paul Clouët “Brut Rosé” NV (Bouzy)**

**Disgorged November 2013**

The Paul Clouët “Brut Rosé” currently in the market is from the base year of 2010 and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. This is composed of the classic family *cépages* of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, but with twelve percent of the blend made up of Bouzy *rouge*. The wine is lovely on the nose, offering up a vibrant blend of blood orange, cherries, cinnamon stick, wheat toast, gentle smokiness and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and vinous in personality, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. Good juice. 2016-2025. **91**.

**R. H. Coutier “Cuvée Rosé” Grand Cru Brut NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged November 2015**

The current release of non-vintage “Cuvée Rosé” from R. H. Coutier is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with all of the pinot being added as still red wine, to give this a very vinous personality. The wine offers up a complex bouquet of cherries, blood orange, rye bread, lovely soil tones, a bit of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is quite deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core, frothy *mousse*, good acids and a long,

focused and almost meaty finish. This cries out to be served with the main course at the table, rather than as an aperitif and really is a beautifully made bottle. 2016-2025+. **91+**.

**Champagne Drappier Brut Rosé NV (Urville)**

As I noted in the past, the Drappier Brut Rosé is one hundred percent pinot noir from the estate's own Aube vineyards and is produced by the *saignée* method, so that its lovely cherry color is from skin contact, rather than by adding a bit of still red wine to the blend. The cuvée is aged two and a half years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and has a *dosage* of 7.5 grams per liter. The current release in the market is really pretty and stylish on the nose, offering up a vibrantly complex mix of strawberries, a touch of blood orange, chalky soil tones, rye toast, woodsmoke and a hint of clove in the upper register. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, lovely minerality and a long, nascently complex and still quite tightly-knit and youthful finish. I was surprised how youthful the structure still was here, given how open the nose is at the present time, but it is certainly approachable today and should really blossom with a year or two in the cellar. 2017-2027. **90+**.

**Duval-Leroy "Rosé Prédige" Brut NV (Vertus)**

The Duval-Leroy "Rosé Prédige" non-vintage bottling is produced of the *saignée* method and is comprised of a blend of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. This bottling is aged thirty-six months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is really quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of pomegranate, blood orange, chalky soil tones, wheat toast and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, quite nice complexity and a fairly long, zesty finish. The balance here is lovely, but it is not as long as some of its contemporaries on the backend. Still, a lovely drink for the next dozen years or so. 2016-2030. **90+**.

**Gatinois "Grand Cru" Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ) Disgorged April 2014**

The current release of non-vintage Gatinois Brut Rosé is a superb wine that is comprised of ninety percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay, with all the grapes hailing from the Gatinois family's holdings in the village of Aÿ. The wine spends three years aging *sur latte* and was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The nose is really vibrant and open today, jumping from the glass in an almost meaty, classically Aÿ blend of cherries, blood orange, a touch of clove, beautiful smokiness, spices meats, orange zest and gorgeous soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, lovely soil inflection, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and impressively complex finish. This is very high class, vinous example Brut Rosé that is drinking with great style today, but will clearly age as well. Great juice and a stellar bargain in the world of Rosé Champagne! 2016-2030+. **92+**.

**Champagne Geoffroy "Rosé de Saignée" Premier Cru Brut NV (Aÿ) Disgorged July 2015**

The new release of the Champagne Geoffroy "Rosé de Saignée" non-vintage Brut is base year 2012. It is dark, cherry red in color and is composed entirely of pinot noir, with the fruit hailing from vineyards in the village of Cumières. As I noted last year, this wine does not undergo malo and was aged for two and a half years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet offers up a deep and vinous constellation of cherries, blood orange, a touch of cinnamon stick, rose petals, wheat toast and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, impressively light on its feet finish. This is very tasty and would be stellar with turkey come holiday time. 2016-2026+. **91**.

### **Philippe Gonet Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The new release of Philippe Gonet non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of ninety percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir, which is not too surprising, given that the family domaine is based in the heart of chardonnay country in Mesnil-sur-Oger. The wine spends three years in the cellars prior to release and is a lovely, pale salmon color. The nose is a pretty blend of strawberries, tangerine, brioche, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and well-balanced, with solid depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and nice length and grip on the high-toned, but fairly complex finish. Like all of the non-vintage bottlings that I sampled from Monsieur Gonet, this is a stylish, *aperitif* weight bottle of bubbly. 2016-2025. **89.**

### **Marc Hébrart Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged December 2015**

The current release of Jean-Paul Hébrart's non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with just over eight percent of the pinot noir in the blend still wine, which was aged for a year in cask prior to being added to the cuvée. The wine spends twenty-four months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and delivers a fine nose of white cherries, melon, wheat toast, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and quite good length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This has lovely appeal right out of the blocks, but should also keep nicely for a decade or so. 2016-2025+. **91.**

### **Charles Heidsieck "Rosé Réserve" Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged 2015**

The current release of Charles Heidsieck "Rosé Réserve" non-vintage Brut is a similar blend to the Brut Réserve, with one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. This constitutes seventy-five percent of the blend, with twenty percent made up of reserve wines out of the cellar and five percent still red pinot noir. The wine is aged three years *sur latte*, but the back label on my bottle did not have a date of disgorgement, so I do not know what the base year is on this particular release. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a complex and vibrant bouquet of tangerine, white cherries, rye bread, chalky soil tones gentle smokiness and a delicate topnote of orange blossom. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and frothy, with a lovely core, excellent complexity and grip, lovely balance and a long, elegant and light on its feet finish. This does not have the same mature elements as the Brut Réserve bottling, but it is in the same league in quality, albeit younger juice. 2016-2030+. **92.**

### **Champagne Henriot Brut Rosé NV (Reims)**

Champagne Henriot's non-vintage Brut Rosé is quite pale salmon in color and is comprised of a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with the pinot consisting of a bit more than half of the *cépages*. The bouquet is bright and complex, offering up scents of tangerine, white cherry, chalky minerality, rye bread, dried rose petals and a touch of clove-like spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and still quite brisk structurally, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, racy and youthful finish. This is certainly approachable today, but will be far more generous on the palate with a year or two of further bottle age. Fine juice, but still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking. 2017-2030+. **90+.**

### **Benoît Lahaye "Rosé de Macération" Extra Brut NV (Bouzy)**

Benoît Lahaye's non-vintage "Rosé de Macération" bottling is produced entirely from a forty year-old parcel of pinot noir in the *lieu à dit* of les Juliennes in Bouzy. The *vin clair* for this bottling is made from whole clusters, with a two to three day maceration period producing the wine's beautiful deep salmon color. It is finished off with a *dosage* of under three grams per liter.

The bouquet is deep, pure and complex, offering up a spicy nose of blood orange, cherries, a touch of clove, beautifully complex soil tones, a bit of rye bread and discreet smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with marvelous mid-palate depth, brisk, beautifully integrated acids, elegant *mousse* and outstanding focus and grip on the perfectly balanced and vibrant finish. This wine will have a lovely vinous note at full maturity, which is probably still a handful of years down the road. Superb juice that is very tasty today, but will be even better down the road. 2016-2035. **92+**.

**Laherte Frères “Rosé Ultradition” Brut NV (Chavot)**

**Disgorged September 2015**

The current release of Laherte Frères “Rosé Ultradition” non-vintage Brut is made of a different *cépages* than the Brut Tradition bottling I reported on after my visit to the domaine in Chavot last year. This bottling is comprised of a blend of fifty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent pinot noir, ten percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot meunier still red wine. It was finished with a *dosage* of around 6.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine and complex nose of cherries, blood orange, rye toast, chalky soil tones, a touch of cinnamon stick and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with an excellent core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant and youthful finish. Aurélien Laherte is making beautiful wines these days and this is a very classy example of Brut Rosé. 2016-2030. **91+**.

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

The current release of Lamiable’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is quite a deep cherry red, indicating a fairly large percentage of still pinot noir in the blend, but I could not find technical details for the precise percentages. The bouquet wafts from the glass in mix of blood orange, strawberries, wheat toast, chalky soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, slightly coarse bubbles, bright acids and good length and grip on the fairly well-balanced finish. This seems a tad younger than the non-vintage Brut bottling and is not quite as refined as a result. 2016-2025. **88.**

**Lanson “Rose Label” Brut Rosé NV (Reims)**

**Disgorged May 2013**

The Lanson non-vintage Brut Rosé is a blend of fifty-three percent pinot noir, thirty-two percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier and spends two and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, after which it spends another six months further in the cellars to recover prior to being shipped. The wine offers up a really lovely bouquet of tangerine, rye toast, chalky soil tones, a touch of white cherry and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and wide open, with refined *mousse*, a good core and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2016-2030. **90.**

**Lanson “Extra Age” Brut Rosé NV (Reims)**

The current release of Lanson “Extra Age” non-vintage Brut Rosé was disgorged all the way back in December of 2011 and then was given extended bottle aging in the cellars in Reims prior to shipping into the market. As I noted when tasting this bottling a year ago, this is a blend of 2002, 2004 and 2005 vintage *vins clairs*. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a superb bouquet of tangerine, white cherries, rye bread, lovely minerality, dried rose petals and a gently spicy topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, excellent focus and balance and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Fine juice. 2016-2035. **93.**



**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 fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is made by the *saignée* method and spends a short time macerating on the skins prior to the start of fermentation to give it its pale salmon color. The Base Year 2013 Rosé offers up a pure and beautifully complex bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, blood orange, complex soil tones, rye bread and a distinctly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and a very, very long finish that closes with fine soil signature and grip. This was a touch reductive when first opened and really deserves some cellaring time, but with a bit of air, it was really not all that hard to drink in its more structured youth! 2020-2045+. **92+**.

**Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV (Base Year 2011)**

The 2011 base year bottling of Vincent Laval’s Brut Nature Rosé is really starting to drink well at age five. The nose wafts from the glass in a smoky blend of cherries, blood orange, a touch of brown spices, a complex base of soil, citrus peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, long and really starting to blossom today, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. A lovely bottle of Rosé. 2016-2035. **91**.



*Wild flowers growing in one of Vincent Laval’s organically-farmed vineyards in Cumières.*

**David Léclapart “l’Alchimiste” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Trépail) LV09**

This was my first taste of David Léclapart’s Rosé bottling, which he makes via the *saignée* method. The base year for this bottling is 2009, and this is his only bottling in which he uses his pinot noir, which comprises ten percent of his three hectares of vines in the village of Trépail and makes up the entirety of this blend. The wine spends anywhere from one to three days macerating, with the grapes trod by foot three or four times a day during this period and then fermented entirely in old Burgundy casks. The 2009 version received a *dosage* of two grams per liter and offers up a lovely, vibrant nose of blood orange, rhubarb, stony minerality, rose petals, smoke and rye toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and excellent mineral drive on the long and perfectly balanced finish. This is a lovely bottle of Rosé Champagne that is emphatically built to accompany food. 2016-2030. **92+**.

**Champagne Lombard Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV (Épernay) Disgorged April 2016**

The Lombard non-vintage Brut Rosé Premier Cru is assembled from a blend of forty percent pinot noir from Bouzy, fifty percent Côte de Blancs chardonnay and ten percent still pinot noir, which found its origin in vineyards from Verzenay. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter, spent twenty-four months *sur latte* and hails from the base year of 2013. The nose is bright and classy, jumping from the glass in a blend of blood orange, cherries, wheat toast, lovely soil tones and a gentle topnote of cloves. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, and still fairly youthful, with brisk acids, a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is going to be lovely Brut Rosé, but it could do with another six months to unwind more fully on the palate. 2017-2025+. **90+**.

**Champagne Lombard et Cie “Tanagra” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Épernay) Disg: 11/15**

The Lombard et Cie “Tanagra” Brut Rosé is composed entirely of pinot noir sourced from the grand cru village of Verzenay and was finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. All the fruit hails from the 2012 vintage, and the wine is made by the *saignée* method, with spent twelve hours of skin contact. The color is fairly dark salmon and the wine shows lovely vinosity in its refined bouquet of blood orange, cherry, cinnamon stick, excellent soil tones, wheat bread and rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, brisk acids, pinpoint bubbles and a quite dry palate impression from its low *dosage*. The backend mineral drive here is very nice and this will be quite complex with a bit of bottle age, but it is still a tad on the young side for primetime drinking. With the excellent acidity here, it would not have been a crime to let the *dosage* creep up to four or five grams per liter, as this would have buffered the acids a bit more in the wine’s youth and still kept it dry and svelte on the palate. 2018-2030+. **90+**.

**Arnaud Margaine Brut Rosé Premier Cru NV (Villers-Marmery) Disg. Sept. 2015**

The new release of Arnaud Margaine’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is from the base year and comprised of a blend of seventy-two percent chardonnay and twenty-eight percent pinot noir. The wine is a lovely salmon color and offers up a bright and classy nose of strawberries, white cherries, chalky soil tones, a touch of brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and very respectable length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not overly long on complexity out of the blocks, but it has fine constituent components and more complexity could easily emerge with further bottle age. 2016-2025. **89+**.



**Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 12” Grand Cru Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay)**

The Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 12” Extra Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir. The bouquet is pure, vibrant and complex, wafting from the glass in a superb blend of wild strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, *patissière*, gentle smokiness and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and impressively light on its feet, with outstanding mid-palate depth, lovely transparency, fine acids, elegant *mousse* and a very long, focused and refined finish. Benoît Marguet has a reputation as a Rosé specialist and this beautiful 2012 version will do nothing to tarnish that image! 2016-2035. **93.**

**Christophe Mignon “Pur Meunier” Brut Rosé NV (Festigny) Disgorged December 2015**

Christophe Mignon’s Brut Rosé is made entirely of pinot meunier, from vines that were planted in 1976 and are now reaching a very, very good age. The current release is a fifty-fifty blend of 2012 and 2011 vintage *vins clairs* and was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The color is quite a deep salmon and the wine jumps from the glass in a fine aromatic constellation of blood orange, strawberries, wheat toast, a lovely base of soil, just a whisper of clove-like spice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. A lovely bottle. 2016-2025. **91.**

**Moutard Père et Fils “Rosé de Cuvaion” Brut NV (Buxeuil) Disgorged January 2016**

Moutard Père et Fils has produced a lovely new version of their “Rosé de Cuvaion” is once again all pinot noir and spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, so this will be all from the fine base year of 2012. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of ten grams per liter and offers up a really beautiful and vibrant bouquet of tangerine, white cherries, rye toast, chalky minerality and dried rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, crisp and nicely light on its feet, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, dancing and complex finish. This is a very classy bottle, but without quite the same depth and length as found in their current release of Grande Cuvée. 2015-2025. **90+.**

**Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Incandescent” Rosé Saignée Brut NV**

The Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Incandescent” 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. The new release is base year 2012, with fifty percent of the *vins clairs* was barrel-fermented and the wine finished off with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter, which is one gram per liter less than last year’s version. The wine has a deep ruby color, due to its twenty hours of skin contact, and offers up a fine bouquet of blood orange, strawberries, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality and some dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and totally refined in profile, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, vibrant acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2025+. **92+.**

**Franck Pascal “Tolérance” Brut Rosé NV (Baslieux-sous-Châtillon) Disgorged Nov. 2014**

Franck Pascal is one of the biodynamic farmers in Champagne, tilling four hectares spread out over five separate villages in the Vallée de Marne. His “Tolérance” Brut Rosé is a blend of two-thirds pinot meunier and one-third chardonnay. The wine wafts from the glass in a refined aromatic blend of tangerine, rye bread, flinty minerality, lovely spice tones and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a fine core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the complex

finish. While I do not have precise information on the *dosage* here, it is low and I would guess around four grams per liter. Fine juice that should age very well indeed. 2016-2030. **92.**

**Champagne Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Brut Rosé NV (Reims) Disgorged May 2015**

The new release of Bruno Paillard’s Première Cuvée Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay and was finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. As is always the case, this is quite a pale salmon color and offers up a really lovely, pure and youthful aromatic constellation of cherry skin, peach, rye bread, a lovely base of chalky minerality, citrus peel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core of fruit, superb *mousse*, fine balance and a very long, pure and vibrant finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2035+. **93.**

**Piper-Heidsieck “Rosé Sauvage” Brut NV (Reims)**

It had been two years since I last saw a new release of Piper-Heidsieck’s “Rosé Sauvage”, which includes twenty-five percent still pinot noir in the blend. As is always the case for this bottling, the color here is quite deep for a rosé Champagne, with the nose offering up plenty of vinosity in its aromatic constellation of cherries, rhubarb, cinnamon stick, lovely soil tones and wheat toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, good focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and almost a whisper of tannin on the long and slightly meaty finish. This is always best drunk through the meal at table and the new release is a fine follow-up to the last version I tasted two years ago. A lovely wine. 2016-2025. **91.**

**Dom Ruinart Brut Rosé NV (Reims)**

The new release of non-vintage Dom Ruinart Brut Rosé is really a beautiful color, with cherry highlights in its deep salmon most inviting. The *cépages* is forty-five percent chardonnay and fifty-five percent pinot noir, with the wine going through full malo and finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. I do not know what percentage of the pinot noir in the blend is still wine. The nose is really first class, wafting from the glass in a deep and complex blend of cherries, blood orange, rye bread, complex soil tones, a touch of cinnamon stick, orange peel and rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, lovely balance, elegant *mousse* and a long, classy finish. Good juice that should be even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age. 2106-2035. **91+.**

**Varnier-Fannière “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Avize)**

**Disgorged April 2015**

The Varnier-Fannière “Grand Cru” non-vintage Brut Rosé is mostly made up 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 new release offers up a bright and vibrant bouquet of melon, cherries, rose petals, a touch of brioche and chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, focused and full-bodied, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the youthful finish. This is quite tasty today, but another six to twelve months in the bottle will really allow the wine to emerge more fully from behind its structural elements and hit on all cylinders. Fine juice. 2016-2030. **91+.**

**Veuve Clicquot Brut Rosé NV (Reims)**

The current release of the non-vintage Veuve Clicquot Brut Rosé is quite good, but it does not seem to have moved up as much as the new release of the Yellow Label in quality. The color is the lovely salmon of Clicquot Rosé, but the wine cannot not quite match the complexity and depth of the remainder of the lineup of current releases. The bouquet is bright and classy, but lacks just a bit of gravitas in its blend of strawberry, apple, lovely soil tones, gentle smokiness and a touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and well-balanced, but lacking that extra element of complexity, with a moderate core, elegant *mousse* and

good, but not great length on the crisp and focused finish. This is a very good bottle, but I was hoping for just a bit more, based on the notable step up in energy level in the entire remainder of the Clicquot portfolio of current releases! 2016-2025+. **88.**

### ***Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs***

#### **2011 Domaine Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature**

The 2011 Les Chênes from Monsieur Laval is a simply transcendental example of this difficult vintage, as there is nothing “off vintage” at all about this beautiful Blanc de Blancs in the making! The bouquet is young and potentially magical, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, acacia, a complex base of chalky soil, brioche, smoke, lemon blossoms and an overt touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and youthfully tight-knit, with a rock solid core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and laser-like focus on the very long and vibrant finish. I would give this a minimum of six or seven years in the cellar to allow its spine of acidity to relax and the wine truly blossom and start to drink with generosity. But, keeping one’s hands off of bottles of this superb wine is going to be challenging! 2022-2050. **95+.**

#### **2010 Marguet Père et Fils “les Bermonts” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut    Disgorged 12/14**

The first vintage of les Bermonts is from the growing season of 2010 and the wine is simply superb. When I tasted this fifteen months ago at the domaine, it was still pretty tight behind its structure, but it has blossomed beautifully in the intervening time and is really a superb drink. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of pear, white peach, almond paste, a touch of oak spice, great soil tones, white flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly svelte in personality, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the elegant and vibrant finish. This is not as powerfully built as the Les Crayères bottling from Monsieur Marguet, but in its more understated way, it is every bit as profound a single vineyard bottling. 2016-2040+. **94.**

#### **2009 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Fleuron” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Cuis)    Disg: 10/14**

The 2009 Cuvée Fleuron from Didier Gimonnet is comprised of a blend of chardonnay from some of the finest Côte de Blancs villages, including Chouilly, Cramant, Cuis and Oger. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel and aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, chalky minerality and fresh almond. On the palate the wine is deep and full-bodied, but a bit bound up still in its acidity, with a solid core, brisk acids, slightly coarse *mousse* and good, but not great length on the finish. There is a slightly bitter element on the backend that seems out of place for a 2009 vintage bottling, given the ripe fruit of the year. This may improve with further bottle age, but it is not the strongest recent release from Didier Gimonnet. 2018-2035? **87+.**

#### **2009 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre de Vertus” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Vertus)**

The 2009 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre de Vertus” offers up a truly beautiful bouquet, redolent of delicious apples, pears, brioche, chalky minerality, a touch of lemon oil and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, nicely integrated acids and fine length and grip on the focused and complex finish. When I saw that this was now a Brut Nature, I wondered if it would show any youthful austerity at this point in its evolution, but the wine is really drinking very well already and will age gracefully as well. 2016-2035. **91+.**

**2009 Jean Milan “Symphorine” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut (Oger)**

The 2009 “Symphorine” from Jean Milan is sourced from a parcel of old vines in Oger and spent fully five years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in August of 2014. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of pear, apple, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, apple blossoms and a touch of fresh almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully structured, with a good core, zesty acids, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still very primary finish. This is approachable today, but it is still very youthful and I would tuck it away in the cellar for another few years and really let it blossom fully. There are lovely raw materials here, just show a bit of patience and let the structure peel back. 2019-2035. **91.**

**2008 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Oenophile” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Cuis)**

It has been a year since I last tasted the 2008 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Oenophile” Blanc de Blancs. As I noted then, this is actually *non-dosé*, though this is labeled as an Extra Brut, with 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 “Fleurion” cuvée, but without any *dosage*. However, this bottle was disgorged in October 2015, rather than the July 2014 disgorged bottle I tasted a year ago. The wine is aged fully six years *sur latte* and the bouquet offers up a complex and smoky blend of pear, almond, chalky soil tones, brioche and lovely smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an excellent core, fine focus and grip, fairly large bubbles, but a long, balanced and vibrant finish. As was the case last year, the only thing that keeps my score down a touch is the slight coarseness of the *mousse*. But there is fine depth and complexity here, and if less refined bubbles is not a big deal to you, add a couple of points to the score. 2016-2025+. **91.**

**2008 Pierre Péters “lès Chétillons” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The 2008 Pierre Péters “lès Chétillons” was finished off this year with a *dosage* of four to five grams per liter, and this old vine bottling is excellent in this lovely vintage. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a youthful and vibrant blend of apple, pear, smoky overtones, chalky minerality and fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and impeccable balance on the long, complex and nicely focused finish. This is a lovely wine. 2016-2035. **93.**

**2007 Pierre Callot “les Avats” Vignes Anciennes Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize) Disg: 6/15**

I tasted the 2007 les Avats, Pierre Callot’s old vine bottling from this single vineyard in Avize, last year, but this current release had the opportunity to spend an additional year aging in its fine lees prior to disgorgement. This is as non-malo bottling and this release spent seven years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, peach, plenty of smokiness, chalky soil, nutskin, fresh-baked bread and a nice topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and is blossoming from behind its girdle of acidity, with excellent mid-palate intensity, frothy *mousse* and very fine length and grip on the complex and now wide open finish. This still has excellent cut and grip, but it has really blossomed with further aging on its lees and is really drinking beautifully today. 2016-2035. **92.**

**2007 Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

The 2007 Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is a lovely wine that shows more depth at the core than their stylish non-vintage bottling, but retains the same lightness of step that is the house style. The fine nose wafts from the glass in a blend of pear, white peach,

*crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, crisp and complex, with fine focus and balance, elegant *mousse*, a good core and lovely length on the wide open and classy finish. Good juice. 2016-2035. **91+**.

**2006 Clos Lanson Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims) Disgorged December 2014**

The inaugural vintage of Clos Lanson is outstanding and one of the youngest examples of the 2006 vintage that I have tasted in quite some time. The wine offers up a deep and very, very refined bouquet of apple, lemon, smoky overtones, fresh-baked bread, salty soil tones and a lovely topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and seamless, with a superb core of fruit, nascent complexity, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, zesty and unrepentantly elegant finish. There is outstanding mineral drive on the backend of this wine, with the salty personality of the limestone in the Clos Lanson very much in evidence already. What fun it is tasting a single vineyard Blanc de Blancs from Champagne Lanson, which has always been a pinot noir house! The 2006 was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter and the wine was allowed to age for more than eighteen months in the cellar after its disgorgement, to allow it to seamlessly recover. This is truly an exceptional new wine from Lanson! 2016-2040+. **95**.

**2005 Champagne Corbon “Blanc de Blancs” Chardonnay Grand Brut Millésime (Avize)**

It has been a bit more than a year since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the '05 Corbon Grand Brut Millésime and the wine is still singing. The excellent nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of pear, apple, hazelnut, chalky soil tones and gentle upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with excellent mid-palate depth, elegant, pinpoint bubbles, zesty acids and lovely balance and grip on the complex and still quite youthful finish. At age eleven, this is still very early days for a vintage-dated bottling from the Corbon family, but the wine is starting to really drink well and it is no crime to be savoring bottles right now! 2016-2040. **92+**.

**2005 Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs “Belemnita” Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

This is the Gonet family's top of the line bottling of Blanc de Blancs, with all the grapes for this bottling hailing from a parcel of old vines in Mesnil, with some vines dating back to 1929. The wine spends six years aging *sur latte* and is finished with a *dosage* of under three grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and very classy, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, white peach, brioche, a fine base of chalky minerality, white flowers and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely focused, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This is quite tasty today, but it is still a puppy and it will really start to hit on all cylinders with another four or five years' worth of bottle age. 2016-2040. **92+**.

**2005 J. Lasalle Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Chigny-les-Roses)**

The 2005 Lasalle Blanc de Blancs is a very tasty bottle that is wide open and hitting on all cylinders today, but the *dosage* seemed a tad overgenerous and kept the score down just a touch. The bouquet is quite lovely, offering up scents of fresh almond, pear, delicious apple, sweet pastry and a discreet base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and easy-going structurally, with a solid core, refined *mousse* and good solid length and grip on the ever so slightly sweet finish. I am usually a big fan of the Lasalle wines, so the slightly high *dosage* caught me a bit by surprise on this bottle. Perhaps it was a recently disgorged example? 2016-2025+. **89+?**

**2004 Dom Riunart “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

**Disgorged July 2014**

The 2004 Dom Riunart Blanc de Blancs is a lovely and youthful example of this fine vintage, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, brioche, a touch of nuttiness, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a hint of butter in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with lovely balance and focus, a rock solid core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a very long, very refined and still quite youthful finish. This is still a youthful wine and far more complexity will emerge with some extended cellaring, but it is impeccably balanced and really is already quite easy to drink with great pleasure. High class juice. 2016-2045. **95.**

**2002 Pol Roger “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

It had been nearly two years since I last drank a bottle of the 2002 Blanc de Blancs from Pol Roger and I was very happy to see this wine cruising along beautifully. The bouquet is deep, complex and really starting to open up very nicely today, offering up scents of apple, pear, brioche, a vine base of limestone minerality, orange zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and delivers plenty of ripe fruit at the core, with lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and complex finish. A lovely showing. 2016-2035. **94.**



**1999 Champagne Jacques Selosse Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Avize) Magnum**

The 1999 Blanc de Blancs from Anselme Selosse is drinking at its apogee at age seventeen, but still has plenty of life in it. The bouquet offers up a mature and impressively complex blend of baked apple, peach, sweet almonds, a lovely base of chalky minerality, brioche, a touch of orange peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovey core, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the vibrant and classy finish. 2016-2030. **94.**

**1996 Saint Chamant “Cuvée de Chardonnay” Brut (Épernay)**

The 1996 Cuvée de Chardonnay from Saint Chamant is now drinking at its apogee and offers up beautiful complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is starting to show that gentle touch of oxidation of a Champagne at its peak, offering up a blend of baked peach, delicious apple, sweet brioche, chalky minerality, fresh almond and touch of oxidation. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced and wide open finish. A lovely drink. 2016-2035. **93.**

**1990 Pol Roger “Blanc de Chardonnay” Brut (Épernay)**

The 1990 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs is now fully into its apogee of maturity and is drinking very nicely. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of baked apples, peaches, walnuts, warm bread, a lovely base of soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with the gentle notes of oxidation of mature bubbly, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and sound acids and grip on the long and focused finish. Just a lovely moment for drinking this bottle. 2016-2030. **92.**

**1988 Salon Blanc de Blancs Brut (Mesnil-sur-Oger)**

This most recent bottle of 1988 Salon was drinking very nicely, with a gently oxidative note on the nose and palate nicely flanked by fine depth of fruit and very good minerality. The bouquet is a fully mature blend of caraway see, baked apple and peach, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and quite solid at the core, with good cut and grip, fine *mousse* and a very discreet touch of oxidation weaving its way on the fairly long finish. This is drinking very nicely right now, but is not likely to hold at this level a whole lot longer. A good drink today in its more tertiary style. 2016-2025. **92.**

***Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut***

**2010 Marguet Père et Fils “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Millésime (Ambonnay)**

Benoît Marguet has christened his Brut Millésime bottling as “Ambonnay” starting with this 2010 vintage, as all the fruit for this wine hails from his vineyards in this grand cru village. Readers may recall that the 2009 vintage was called Amboniacus and had included the production from small parcel of vines that the family farms in Bouzy, but the 2010 is all from Ambonnay. The wine is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex aromatic blend of apple, white peach, fresh almond, *patissière*, a complex base of soil, a hint of menthol and a dollop of cask influence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a great core, fine mineral drive, ripe acids, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and focused finish. Outstanding juice. 2016-2050. **93+.**

**2010 Pehu-Simonet “Fins Lieux No. 5” Brut Millésime (Verzenay) Disg: February 2015**

While Pehu Simonet is based in Verzenay, they produce their “Fins Lieux No. 5” from their vineyard parcels of chardonnay in Mesnil-sur-Oger, making this a Blanc de Blancs, though



this does not appear on the label. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel, do not go through malo and spend forty months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, with the finishing *dosage* 8.5 grams per liter. The wine delivers a fine, complex and smoky nose of delicious apple, lemon, chalky soil tones, brioche, a touch of fresh nutmeg and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, fairly brisk acids and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and still quite youthful finish. As this is a non-malo bubbly, the *dosage* here is really quite judicious and seamlessly buffers the acidity, giving the wine the impression of being quite a bit drier than 8.5 grams per liter. This is tasty today, but clearly will age well and should be even better three or four years down the road. Good juice. 2016-2030+. **91+**.

**2010 Vilmart Cie “Grand Cellier d’Or” Brut 1er Cru (Rilly la Montagne) Disg: July 2014**

The 2010 version of Vilmart Cie’s “Grand Cellier d’Or” is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir (from a single plot of forty-five year-old vines in the village of Rilly la Montagne). As I mentioned previously, the *vins clairs* for this bottling do not go through malolactic and are aged for ten months in oak casks (a mix of older and new barrels) prior *assemblage*. The 2010 Grand Cellier d’Or spent three years on the lees prior to disgorgement and offers up a fine, gently new oaky nose of apple, pear, acacia blossom, chalky minerality, brioche and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, very refined *mousse* and lovely cut on the long and zesty finish. This is still a young wine and really could use a few years in the cellar to better absorb its touch of new wood, but it is a delicious glass already and will only be better with further bottle age. 2016-2035+. **93**.

**2009 H. Billiot Fils “Brut Millésimé” Grand Cru (Ambonnay) Disgorged June 2015**

I tasted this wine last summer, but that example was disgorged six months earlier than the current example in the market. The 2009 H. Billiot Fils “Brut Millésimé” is a bit more than seventy-five percent pinot noir, with the remainder of the *cépage* made up of chardonnay, with this example spending four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine mix of apple, peach, warm biscuits, complex soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a nice touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a beautiful combination of 2009’s ripeness and excellent structural integrity. The wine is rock solid at the core, the *mousse* is refined, the acids are bright and zesty and there is excellent complexity on the long and well-balanced finish. I was very impressed with this wine a year ago and it is not lost a step in the intervening twelve months! Fine juice. 2016-2035. **92+**.

**2009 Marguet Père et Fils “les Crayères” Extra Brut Millésime**

It has been a bit more than a year since I last tasted a bottle of the 2009, single vineyard bottling of les Crayères from Benoît Marguet and the wine is starting to really drink with conviction. The bouquet is pure and complex, offering up an outstanding constellation of apple, pear, a very complex base of chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread, *crème patissière*, discreet smokiness and a beautiful floral topnote that remains redolent of acacia. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very much defined by its minerality, with a rock solid core of fruit, laser-like focus, refined *mousse* and a very, very long, vibrant and complex finish. There is a seamless beauty to the 2009 les Crayères from Monsieur Marguet that is truly exceptional, not to mention outstanding structure and purity for this riper vintage. The wine is still a few years from really

blossoming completely, but it is awfully impressive in the glass right now and quite hard to resist! 2016-2040+. **94.**

**2008 Champagne Geoffroy “Empreinte” 1er Cru Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged July 2015**

It has been a year since I last tasted the 2008 Empreinte from Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy, with this release having been disgorged eight months later than the one I tasted last summer. As I noted last year, this 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, with eighty percent of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented. There is no malo here. The new release carries its wood very nicely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, lovely soil tones, a touch of oak char and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and the fairly long, complex and wide open finish. The recent disgorgement of the 2008 Empreinte is really singing right now and is a lovely glass of bubbly. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**2008 Champagne Grongnet “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Étoges) Disgorged Feb. 2015**

As I noted last spring, the 2008 “Special Club” bottling from the Grongnet family 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 wine is aged six years *sur latte* and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. This is a non-malo wine. Another year in the bottle has allowed this wine to truly blossom on both the nose and palate and is really showing beautifully today, offering up a complex nose of apple, pear, chalky minerality, lime zest, smoky overtones and bread dough. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with excellent mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, ripe acids, great balance and a long, complex and very classy finish. This is a beautiful example of this outstanding vintage. 2016-2040. **93.**

**2008 Champagne Bruno Paillard “Assemblage” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

I did not write down the date of disgorgement for the 2008 Bruno Paillard, but as the house always keeps their vintage bottlings a minimum of twelve months in the cellar to recover and there is only a single disgorgement for this bottling, it is not too important. The *cépages* of the '08 is forty-two percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay and sixteen percent pinot meunier. The wine spent fully seven years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. This is still a young wine, but the impeccable balance and purity of the 2008 vintage are already very much in evidence, as the nose offers up scents of apple, nectarine, stony minerality, caraway seed, *patissière*, gentle smokiness and a touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a very long, nascently complex and utterly seamless finish. This is all too easy to drink today, but it really deserves some time in the cellar to allow it to blossom fully and start to show its secondary layers of complexity. Fine juice. 2020-2050+. **94+.**

**2008 Veuve Clicquot Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2008 Veuve Clicquot Brut Millésime is the first bottling here to include five percent barrel-fermented *vins clairs* since the estate transitioned away from *foudres* for stainless steel tanks all the way back in the 1960s. The blend on the '08 is sixty-one percent pinot noir, thirty-four percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier. The wine is pure, youthful and stunningly precise on the nose, offering up scents of tart apple, bread dough, complex minerality, gentle smokiness and a lovely saline element in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very racy, with a great core, zesty acids, refined *mousse* and

outstanding length and grip on the very long and still quite youthful finish. This is approachable today, but will be even better with five or six years in the cellar. This is *Chef de Cave* Dominique Demarville's first vintage bottling since his arrival here in 2006. Impressive! 2016-2040+. **94+**.

**2007 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Paradoxe” Brut (Cuis) Disgorged April 2015**

The 2007 Pierre Gimonnet et Fils “Cuvée Paradoxe” is comprised of a blend of fifty-two percent pinot noir and forty-eight percent chardonnay. As the Gimonnet family's vineyard holdings of twenty-eight hectares only include a half hectare of pinot noir (with a small parcel in both Aÿ and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) and all the rest being chardonnay, the name of the cuvée is not too surprising. The 2007 Cuvée Paradoxe offers up a deep and classy nose of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a touch of spice, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with elegant *mousse*, fine mid-palate intensity, bright acids and fine balance on the long and classy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2035. **92+**.

**2007 Vilmart Cie “Coeur de Cuvée” Brut Millésime (Rilly-la-Montagne) Disg: April 2014**

The 2007 Vilmart Cie “Coeur de Cuvée” is composed of its customary blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir. The wine is really lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of pear, *crème patissière*, lovely soil tones, a touch of vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and still fairly tightly-knit behind its structural elements, with a fine core, very elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the still quite youthful, but focused finish. This is already a lovely wine, albeit on the young side, and I would be inclined to tuck it away in the cellar for a year or two and allow it to come out more fully from behind its girdle of acidity. 2017-2035. **92+**.

**2006 Besserat de Bellefon “Cuvée des Moines” Extra Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

As I noted last year, the 2006 vintage bottling from Besserat de Bellefon is comprised of a blend of fifty-four percent chardonnay, thirty-one percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir. This is a more recent disgorgement than the bottle I reported upon last year, so the current release spent seven and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in September of 2014. The wine is really showing well at the present time, with a lovely combination of the generosity of fruit of the '06 vintage and excellent mineral drive and girdle of acidity from its more recent disgorgement. The bouquet is a fine blend of apple, bread dough, fine, salty minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, excellent focus and grip, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the vibrant finish. Really a lovely '06. 2016-2035. **92**.

**2006 Champagne Baron-Fuenté Brut Millésime (Charly-sur-Marne)**

I had not tasted a bottle of the 2006 Champagne Baron-Fuenté Brut Millésime since last summer and the wine is really starting to come into its apogee at age ten. The *cépages* here is forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir. The wine jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of pear, a touch of fresh nutmeg, gentle pastry cream notes, a fine base of soil and a lovely topnote of those delicately perfumed meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a lovely core and excellent mineral drive on the backend. The *mousse* here is refined, the acids bright and nicely taught and the finish is properly long, poised and balanced and closes with very good complexity. This is showing even better that it was a year ago and is really a classy middleweight. 2016-2030+. **91+**.

### **2006 Domaine Dehours Collection “les Genevraux” Extra Brut (Cerseuil)**

The 2006 Domaine Dehours Collection “les Genevraux” bottling is from a single vineyard planted entirely to pinot meunier, which dates to 1979. Like all of Jérôme Dehours’ *lieux à dit* bottlings, it was barrel-fermented and went through full malo. The wine spent six years aging *sur latte* and was finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The ’06 is showing beautifully today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of white peach, gentle almond tones, a complex base of minerality, warm bread and those delicate meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and showing lovely secondary layers at age ten, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse*, fine acidity and impressive mineral drive on the long and complex finish. I really like the touch of nuttiness that is emerging on the palate here as the wine enters its plateau of maturity. 2016-2026+. **92+**.

### **2006 Henriot Brut Millésimé (Reims)**

### **Disgorged November 2015**

The 2006 Henriot Brut Millésimé is now drinking at its apogee and is showing as well as it has over the course of the two years that I have been following this vintage. The wine is a blend of fifty-five percent chardonnay and forty-five percent pinot noir and this most recent release spent eight years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. The *dosage* is between six and seven grams per liter. The wine is absolutely singing on both the nose and the palate at the present time, with the bouquet offering up a blend of apple, tangerine, lovely minerality, citrus zest, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Just a lovely bottle for current drinking. 2016-2030+. **92+**.



**2006 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)****Disgorged May 2015**

The 2006 Clos des Goisses has just been released into the market and is quite a classic vintage of this great vineyard, with a *cépages* of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay. After eight years aging *sur latte*, this is still a youngster by the long-distance standards of Clos des Goisses, but the wine is showing lovely accessibility out of the blocks and this may be one vintage here that is hard to keep one's hands off of bottles in their relative youth. The outstanding bouquet offers up a ripe and very precise bouquet of pear, hazelnut, gentle smokiness, beautiful limestone minerality, gentle leesiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and balance, impressive nascent complexity and a very long, minerally and intensely flavored finish. This is still quite primary in terms of its development, but it is not overtly steely and dominated by its girdle of acidity out of the blocks and is really very, very easy to drink for such a young Clos des Goisses. Needless to say, it will be even better ten to thirty years down the road. 2016-2050. **95.**

**2006 Piper-Heidsieck "Vintage Brut" (Reims)**

The 2006 Piper-Heidsieck "Vintage Brut" is comprised of a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir in this year, which is atypical for this cuvée, which is usually predominantly pinot. The wine is starting to really drink with style and verve, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of apple, peach, brioche, a touch of citrus zest, lovely soil tones, very discreet leesiness and a gentle topnote of custard. On the palate the wine is vibrant, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, fine delineation and bounce, elegant *mousse* and just a whisper of cask aging poking out on the long and refined finish. This is really a lovely drink today, but it should continue to cruise along beautifully for at least another fifteen to twenty years. 2016-2035+. **92+.**

**2006 Veuve Clicquot "La Grande Dame" Brut (Reims)**

The final blending of the 2006 La Grande Dame was completed prior to Dominique Demarville joining the team at Veuve Clicquot, so we will have to wait for the release of the 2008 version to see his impact on this bottling. The 2006 Grande Dame is a blend of fifty-three percent pinot noir and forty-seven percent chardonnay and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is excellent, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, wheat toast, fine minerality, a touch of smokiness and a nice note of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, deep and complex, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and zesty finish. This is drinking beautifully, but has the balance to age long and gracefully as well. High class juice. 2016-2040. **94+.**

**2005 Domaine Dehours Collection "la Côte en Bosses" Extra Brut (Cerseuil)**

The 2005 la Côte en Bosses from Jérôme Dehours is an old vine blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier that spent six years aging on its fine lees and was finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and vibrant, offering up a beautifully complex constellation of apple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, gentle buttery notes from the barrel fermentation, a complex base of soil tones and a nice topnote of brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with great concentration at the core, impeccable focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and superb complexity on the long, zesty and classy finish. At age eleven this is just starting to reach its apogee of peak drinkability and really is a stellar bottle of bubbly. 2016-2030+. **93.**

**2005 Domaine Dehours Collection “Brisefer” Extra Brut (Cerseuil)**

The 2005 Jérôme Dehours’ Collection “Brisefer” Extra Brut is from a vineyard planted entirely to chardonnay, with the lion’s share of the parcel having gone into the ground and a smaller sub-plot having been planted in 1992. The wine is barrel-fermented and goes through full malo, offering up a fine, maturing nose of baked apples and pears, toasted almond, lovely soil tones and just a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely tertiary elements of maturity, a rock solid core, fine soil signature, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the focused finish. This is the broadest-shouldered of the three single vineyard bottlings that I tasted from Monsieur Dehours, but it shares the same mineral drive and depth of fruit of the other two bottlings. 2016-2025. **92.**

**2005 Henri Goutorbe “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Aÿ) Disgorged November 2014**

The 2005 Henri Goutorbe “Special Club” bottling is a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay and spent eight and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement at the end of 2014. I last tasted this wine a year ago and was equally impressed with the most recent disgorgement, which offers up a superb bouquet of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine signature of chalky soil tones, warm biscuits, wild flowers, Aÿ smokiness and a delicate topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with outstanding mid-palate depth, very elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip, brisk acids and superb length and complexity on the stylish and powerful finish. This bottle seems more vibrant than the previous disgorgement (no real surprise there) and really is classy juice! It will have no trouble aging long and gracefully, but it is a fine, fine glass of bubbly today. 2016- 2030+. **92+.**

**2005 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime (Reims) Disgorged 2015**

The 2005 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime is composed of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay and forty percent pinot noir and was aged eight years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine delivers superb refinement in its complex bouquet of apple, *pain grillé*, pear, a touch of hazelnut, complex soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with outstanding depth at the core, bright acids, very elegant *mousse* and a very long, vibrant and classic finish. At age eleven, the 2005 Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésime is starting to drink splendidly, but it has the structure and balance to age for decades to come. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2035+. **94.**

**2005 Franck Pascal “Quintessence” Extra Brut (Baslieux-sous-Châtillon) Disg: Nov. 2014**

The 2005 Franck Pascal “Quintessence” Extra Brut is composed almost entirely of pinot meunier, with a small amount of pinot noir included in the *cépages*. The bouquet is deep and complex and beginning to show lovely secondary elements at age eleven, offering up notes of apple, white peach, wheat toast, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a lovely, savory topnote that is gently redolent of rosemary. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, elegant *mousse*, lovely complexity and a long, wide open and classy finish. Fine juice. 2016-2030. **92+.**

**2003 Champagne Bruno Paillard “N.P.U.” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

The 2003 Champagne Bruno Paillard “N.P.U.” is a lovely example of this vintage, with the more exotic and deeper-pitched fruit tones of this torrid summer in evidence, but nicely tied to lovely minerality on both the nose and palate. The *cépages* this year is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, all from grand crus, with the pinot hailing from the villages of Mailly, Verzenay and Bouzy and the chardonnay from Oger, Mesnil and Vertus. The bouquet of the 2003 is deep and complex, offering up scents of apple, a touch of yellow plum, *patissière*,

nutskin, a lovely touch of lavender, a fine base of soil, hints of the honeycomb to come and a gentle smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly mineral in personality, with a superb core, fine acids, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the focused and complex finish. I do not think this will make old bones by the high standards of N.P.U., but it clearly has a couple of decades life ahead of it and really works well at the table right now. 2016-2035. **94.**

**2002 Gosset “Cuvée Celebris” Extra Brut Millésime (Épernay)**

The 2002 Gosset “Cuvée Celebris” is a blend of fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir and was finished off with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, pure and a lovely expression of this beautiful vintage, offering up scents of pear, white peach, *patissière*, fresh almonds, a very complex base of soil, a touch of sweet butter and a discreet topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and stunningly poised, with a fine core, lovely transparency, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused, complex and seamless finish. At age fourteen, this wine is drinking brilliantly well, but will clearly cruise along in the cellar for a couple of decades, at the least! A simply stunning bottle. 2016-2035+. **95.**

**2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

**Disgorged February 2012**

I had last tasted the 2002 Lanson Brut Millésime a year ago and found the wine blossomed beautifully in the glass. One year further on had allowed it to more fully reach its apogee and the wine is now drinking with plenty of style and complexity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of apple, gentle leesiness, a nice dollop of nuttiness, sourdough bread, classy soil nuances and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with plenty of mid-palate depth, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and wide open finish. I really like the combination here of the ripeness of 2002 and the non-malo spine that is the Lanson house style. As I failed to note last year, this is a blend of fifty-three percent pinot noir and forty-seven percent chardonnay and spent nine years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. Fine juice. 2016-2035. **92.**

**2002 Lanson “Gold Label” Brut Millésime Magnum (Reims)**

**Disgorged May 2016**

The freshly-disgorged magnum of the 2002 Lanson Brut Millésime is outstanding, and not surprisingly, quite a bit younger and more vibrant in profile than the earlier disgorged regular-sized bottles. The bouquet is deep, pure and classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, *patissière*, apple, lovely soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, vibrant acidity, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the zesty and perfectly balanced finish. Most of the 2002 magnums of this wine are now in the American market, as the Europeans have been quicker to tuck this away in their cellars and I understand that the 2008 vintage is the current magnum release in France today. This is really terrific in magnum and will be worth a special search, as the price is excellent for a top example from the 2002 vintage! 2016-2045+. **93+.**

**2002 Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Rare” Brut**

It had been nearly two years since I last tasted the 2002 Cuvée Rare from Piper-Heidsieck and time seems to have barely touched this great wine. It is now nicely into its plateau of peak maturity, but seems likely to stay here for years and years! The bouquet is deep, bright and nicely toasty, offering up scents of peach, apple, warm bread, a lovely signature of soil, dried flowers, a bit of leesiness and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and



full-bodied, with a great core, impeccable focus and grip, refined *mousse*, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long and complex finish. This is one of the finest vintage of Cuvée Rare that I have ever had the pleasure to taste and it is now drinking with great style and breed. 2016-2040+. **95.**

**2000 Henriot “Cuvée des Enchanteleurs” Brut Millésime (Reims)**

I was very happy to have a chance to cross paths again with the 2000 vintage of Cuvée des Enchanteleurs, as last year’s bottle seemed atypically open and generous when I tasted it and I wondered if this was the style of this vintage or my particular bottle was a bit easy-going structurally. 2000 is of course a bit more forward of a vintage in any case, but this most recent bottle of Enchanteleurs has a bit more vibrancy and cut on the backend than last year’s. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, tangerine, beautifully complex soil tones, brioche, fresh almond, a touch of caraway seed and a lovely floral topnote that is most strikingly redolent of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a superb core, very refined *mousse*, impeccably focus and balance and a very long, classy finish. This is still a more forward vintage than the last several iteration of Cuvée des Enchanteleurs, but this bottle is also showing more vibrancy than last year’s. 2016-2035. **94.**



### **1998 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims)**

It had been three years since I last crossed paths with a bottle of the 1998 Krug Vintage and the wine was just starting to blossom when I had it back in the summer of 2013. Three more years of bottle age have really done justice to this excellent wine and this most recent bottle was absolutely wide open and singing on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is deep, pure and shows a lovely, almost exotic sheen of fresh nutmeg and fresh coconut to augment more classic Krug notes of peach, tangerine, *patissière*, caraway seed and a glorious base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and inviting on the attack, with a rock solid core, great transparency, refined *mousse* and exceptional length and grip on the very long and focused finish. Just a beautiful vintage of Krug that is now reaching its apogee and promises to dazzle for the next several decades. 2016-2045. **95.**

### **1995 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims) served from magnum**

The 1995 Krug in magnum is really starting to drink with style and grace, but it remains a wine that has just reached its plateau of maturity and has years and years of life still ahead of it. The lovely and quite classic nose wafts from the glass in a constellation of apple, peach, caraway seed, a lovely base of minerality, a touch of walnut, rye bread and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a wide open attack, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and really lovely length and grip on the focused and classy finish. Fine juice. 2016-2045. **95.**

### **1990 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime Magnum (Reims) Disgorged March 2016**

As Hervé Dantan recalled about the 1990 vintage, and which I remember very well indeed, the 1990 vintage was initially thought to be an absolute classic in the Champagne region, but the vintage has aged at a brisker pace than was initially hoped and today, it is generally thought of as a very good vintage, but certainly not great and has been eclipsed by the racier and more classic wines of 1988. That said, this magnum of 1990 Lanson was really singing, with the non-malo house style here really providing a structural chassis that is not always evident today in other 1990 vintage Brut bottlings. The bouquet is deep, *à pointe* and complex, offering up scents of baked apple and peach, walnuts, salty soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine girdle of acidity, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and lovely bounce on the long and classy finish. A lovely bottle at its apogee, but with plenty of life still ahead. 2016-2035. **93.**

### **1988 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime Magnum (Reims) Disgorged March 2016**

The 1988 Lanson Vintage Collection bottling is really singing at the present time, with the beautiful nose showing just a bit more complexity and vibrancy than the very, very good 1990 version that preceded it at our tasting. The nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of apple, orange zest, pear, superb minerality, plenty of smokiness and a nice touch of sea salts in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still very racy in profile, with a rock solid core, lovely focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, complex and seamless finish. The 1988 Lanson is now drinking beautifully out of magnum, but it is still early days for this wine and it may yet improve with further bottle age. 2016-2050+. **94.**

### **1976 Lanson “Vintage Collection” Brut Millésime Magnum (Reims) Disgorged March 2016**

This was my first taste of the 1976 Lanson and I was not surprised to see it quite fresh and vibrant at age forty, given the long-aging capabilities of the non-malo wines of Lanson. This is pretty unique in the logs of Lanson vintage bottlings, as chardonnay was actually the dominant

grape in the blend in 1976, with the *cépages* fifty-six percent chardonnay and forty-four percent pinot noir. The wine is fully mature today, but also vibrant on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of peach, fresh apricot, gentle nuttiness, a dollop of honey, superb soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and absolutely at its apogee, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, perfectly balanced and complex finish. Lovely juice. 2016-2030. **93.**

**1975 Bollinger “R.D” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)**

The 1975 Bollinger R.D. has probably been fully mature for a couple of decades, but the wine continues to cruise along beautifully in the heart of its plateau and shows no signs of imminent decline. The bouquet offers up a lovely, complex blend of baked peaches, walnuts, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones and a touch of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite vibrant, with a good core, modest *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and nicely tertiary finish. A lovely drink. 2016-2025. **94.**

**1975 Moët et Chandon “Grand Vintage” Brut Millésime (Épernay) served from magnum**

The 1975 Moët et Chandon “Grand Vintage” Brut Millésime is a recently released wine from this *Grande Marque*, and the wine was showing quite fine this past spring. The bouquet is deep, fully mature and gently leesy in profile, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of wizened apples, walnuts, dusty soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively crisp and vibrant, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and complex finish. The *dosage* here is just a bit generous by today’s terms, but this is a good old bottle of bubbly still with plenty of life in it. 2016-2030. **90.**

***Vintage-Dated Brut Rosé and Oiel de Perdrix***

**2009 Dehours et Fils Oeil de Perdrix “Rose” Brut Millésimé (Mareuil le Port)**

The 2009 Dehours et Fils Oeil de Perdrix is produced almost entirely from pinot meunier, with just a small percentage of chardonnay included in the blend, with the latter raised in older oak barrels. The wine has just the faintest wisp of color from a very discreet maceration, received a *dosage* of only a gram or two and offers up a lovely nose of white peach, *patissière*, delicate meunier floral tones, a really complex base of soil and just a whisper of buttery oak tones from the chardonnay’s sojourn in cask. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very elegant in profile, with a good core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the quite dry finish. A very classy example. 2016-2030+. **92.**

**2008 Veuve Clicquot Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)**

**Disgorged March 2015**

The 2008 Veuve Clicquot Brut Millésime Rosé also includes five percent barrel-fermented *vins clairs* and is another absolutely stellar wine. The wine is the same blend as the 2008 Vintage Brut bottling, but with fourteen percent of the pinot noir included here still wine. The bouquet is outstanding, soaring from the glass in a blaze of cherries, blood orange, plenty of smokiness, rye toast, chalky soil tones, cloves and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant in profile, with a great core, refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and classy finish. Fine, fine juice. 2016-2030+. **94.**

**2006 Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)****Disgorged 2014**

The *cépages* of the 2006 Charles Heidsieck Brut Rosé Millésime is thirty-seven percent chardonnay and sixty-three percent pinot noir, with eight percent of this still red wine. The wine was aged seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The color is quite a light salmon and the bouquet is flat out stunning, jumping from the glass in an exuberant blend of *fraises du bois*, white cherries, a complex base of chalky soil tones, brioche, a whisper of fresh nutmeg, dried rose petals and a bit of smokiness on the breeze in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and utterly refined, with a great core, elegant *mousse*, exemplary focus and grip and a very long, complex and vibrant finish. This wine is drinking beautifully at the present time, but it has that fine spine of acidity and impeccable balance that will carry it on into the future with great style and grace. A beautiful example. 2016-2035. **94.**

**2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé Millésime (Épernay)**

I liked the 2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé well enough to acquire a case of this wine and have been doing my best not to tear through my dozen bottles, as this wine is drinking with great grace at the present time. The wine is a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay, with fifteen percent of the former added as still red wine for color. The bouquet is deep, complex and absolutely *à point* at the moment, delivering a beautiful blend of cherries, sweet cranberries, lovely spice tones, blood orange, wheat toast, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and rock solid at the core, with lovely mineral drive, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and complexity and a fine girdle of acidity tightening everything on the long and perfectly balanced finish. High class juice! 2016-2035. **94.**

**2006 Veuve Clicquot “La Grande Dame” Brut Rosé (Reims)**

For both the vintage-dated and the Grande Dame Rosé bottlings, Veuve Clicquot uses their parcel of Clos Colin in the village of Bouzy for the still red wine that is used to add color to the final blend. The '06 Grande Dame Rosé is comprised entirely of chardonnay and pinot noir, with thirty-three percent of the blend the former and sixty-seven percent of the blend the latter (with fourteen percent still pinot noir). The *dosage* is eight grams per liter and the wine is outstanding, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of tangerine, desiccated cherries, chalky minerality, orange peel and plenty of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with a superb core, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, zesty and wide open finish. This is drinking beautifully right now, but will age very gracefully as well. 2016-2035. **95.**

**2002 Dom Riunart Brut Rosé Millésime (Reims)****Disgorged June 2013**

The 2002 Dom Riunart Brut Rosé is comprised of a blend of eighty percent chardonnay (the same base wine as the 2002 Blanc de Blancs) and twenty percent still pinot noir. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter in 2002 and jumps from the glass in a very refined aromatic constellation of wild strawberries, blood orange, citrus peel, complex, chalky soil tones, rye toast and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively structured at age fourteen, with a superb core, still a fine girdle of acidity, lovely focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, complex and low fat finish. This is lovely juice today, but will get even more vinous in personality as the acids get further opportunity to relax and the wine really starts to reach its apogee. Impressive juice and really a Rosé built to accompany *haute cuisine*. 2016-2035. **94+.**

### **1995 Dom Pérignon Brut Rosé “P2” Plénitudes (Épernay)**

The 1995 Dom Pérignon Brut Rosé “P2” has just been recently released, after spending approximately ten additional years aging *sur latte* in the cellars in Épernay prior to disgorgement and preparation for release into the market. This is the same bottling of '95 DP Brut Rosé that was released many years ago, but with all of the extra time aging on its fine lees, it is a completely different wine at this point in its evolution than the original release. Not surprisingly, the wine is quite remarkably young and vibrant for more than twenty years out from the vintage, offering up a pure, complex and classy bouquet of white cherries, tangerine, lovely, chalky soil tones, citrus peel, gentle smokiness, incipient notes of *patissière* and a dollop of dried rose petals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a superb core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, utterly refined *mousse* and a very long, focused and energetic finish. Just a lovely bottle that will be even better with another five years of aging in the bottle. 2016-2040. **95+**.