

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

May-June 2017

Number Sixty-Nine

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View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at www.viewfromthecellar.com. Inquiries may also be emailed to john@viewfromthecellar.com. Copyright 2017 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either View From the Cellar or John Gilman are fully credited. Please do not share.

**CATHY CORISON'S CABERNET SAUVIGNON
THE RUTHERFORD BENCH AT ITS VERY FINEST**



Cathy Corison is one of Napa's great veteran winemakers, having begun her career in the mid-1970s and including stops as winemaker at Chappellet and Staglin Vineyards prior to starting her own project in the mid-1980s. Her first vintage of her eponymous Corison Winery Cabernet Sauvignon was the legendary 1987, which continues to drink with brilliance to this day. Given her seminal role in so many of Napa's finest cabernet sauvignon bottlings for more than a quarter century, it is surprising that Cathy has kept such a relatively low profile in the heart of the Napa Valley, but one gets the sense when meeting her that this is just exactly the way she likes things to be, with one of her favorite sayings being "I like to let the wines do the talking." In late August of last year, I had a chance to drop by the winery on Route 29 in St. Helena and taste and chat for a couple of hours with Cathy, which was the first time I had ever had the opportunity to visit the estate and taste *sur place*. As Cathy bounced out of her office, apologizing that with the 2016 harvest already getting started she was "a bundle of energy" with the adrenalin charge of that time of year, but could not spare too much time for the obvious reason that the ripe grapes waiting out on the vine, we took a quick stroll around her impeccable cellars and settled into a glass of her 2013 Gewurztraminer on our way to a table laid out with a nice vertical of her two bottlings of cabernet sauvignon. This was the first time that either of us

could remember meeting, though the possibility existed that we might have been introduced to each other at one of her distributor's trade tasting here in New York at some time or another. I had certainly begun selling her wines in my merchant days with her very first vintage of 1987 from her own winery and everywhere that I went in my career over the ensuing years, Corison Cabernet Sauvignon was always part of my wine list or gracing my shop's shelves, as I have always loved her classically elegant expressions of Rutherford Bench cabernet.

Cathy's vineyards are located in Rutherford and St. Helena, on the Napa valley floor on the alluvial soils that were the cornerstone for Californian blossoming wine reputation for high quality bottlings in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. This is the very fertile vineyard land known as the Rutherford Bench and where folks like André Tchelistcheff at Beaulieu Vineyards, the winemakers at Inglenook Vineyards and Joe Heitz really started to catch the world's attention for the potential of Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon at the dawn of California wine's modern age. The crown jewel in the Corison vineyard holdings is the beautiful, three and a quarter hectare Kronos Vineyard in St. Helena, which Cathy was able to buy in 1996. Kronos is quite unique on the valley floor these days, as it was able to escape the long reach of phylloxera and consequently, its vines are now well more than forty years of age, as the vineyard was planted in 1971. I asked Cathy how this was possible, and she commented that "when we purchased the vineyard, it was listed as having been planted on AXR rootstock, like almost everything else on the Rutherford Bench, so the expectation was that it would have to be replanted on another rootstock almost immediately to avoid phylloxera." However, she continued, "when we finally had a chance to do a bit of research, it turned out that the vines were already planted on the phylloxera-resistant St. Georges rootstock and we knew we could keep working with these beautiful old vines." Due to the mislabeling of the rootstock in Kronos, everyone who was shopping for vineyard land in the mid-1990s was ignoring or really putting in low bids for the property, as the shared assumption was that it would have to be replanted almost immediately because of phylloxera and the replanting would entail a significant upfront cost for the new buyer. As Cathy said, "we put in a bid that was not much more than what would have been the price for unplanted land, as this was all that was in our budget at the time, and just hoped that no one else would find out that the vineyard was actually already planted on St. George." It turned out that the owner at this time was a French gentleman who had repatriated back to *La Belle France* several years earlier and was tired of running the property in St. Helena from across the ocean, so he very happily accepted the slightly higher Corison offer in early 1996. It was an absolute coup for Cathy to be able to buy this beautifully-situated vineyard, complete with more than twenty-five year-old vines at the time right in the heart of the Rutherford Bench.

Cathy Corison and her husband, William Martin, were eventually able to track down the gentleman who originally cleared and planted the vineyard back in the early-1970s and he indeed confirmed that Kronos had been fortuitously planted on St. George rootstock. The vineyard is planted on a classic alluvial bed of gravelly loam, which gives the resulting wine an impressive backbone for long-term cellaring, coupled to the telltale elegance that cabernet on the Rutherford Bench has always been known for. The Kronos property at the time also included a beautiful old Victorian farmhouse, such as were found throughout Napa Valley in a bygone age, but which was in dilapidated condition and allegedly condemned and in need of demolition when they purchased the property in 1996. Happily, this too was inaccurate, for though the building was in a state of disrepair and in need of some serious TLC, it was in fact structurally sound and had

never been condemned by the county. As Cathy's husband William is an architect with a passion for restoration projects, this was just perfect for them and today the building is beautifully restored and is a perfect fit with the other structures on the property, giving Corison Winery a feel of having been here since the early post-war period. But, the farmhouse was not the first building project for Cathy and William once taking the deed to the property, as Cathy had to have a *cuvée* for her expanded lineup of wines, now including the Kronos Vineyard and the husband and wife team set about designing a functional space in the shape of a barn that stylistically fit in seamlessly with the Victorian farmhouse already on the property; the winery was completed in 1999. After this, they were able to turn their attention to reclaiming the farmhouse on the property and giving the Corison Winery today a feel as if it has been part and parcel of the valley floor here for several generations, rather than just a couple of decades. Cathy is quick to point out that "though it is my name on the label, this is really a family winery, as William designed the winery and oversees all of the day to day operations of the business."

Cathy Corison began her winemaking journey in the mid-1970s. After completing a Bachelor's degree in Biology from Pomona College in southern California, she went on to attain a Master's Degree in Oenology from UC-Davis. Her first high profile job as a full-time winemaker was at Chappellet Vineyards, where she made the wines from the 1981 through the 1989 vintages. She also crafted the first two commercial releases at Staglin Family Vineyards in 1989 and 1990 (after leaving Chappellet), as well as producing the wines for a decade at York Creek Vineyards and Long Meadow Ranch during her career. When I asked her about wearing so many winemaking hats over the course of her early career, she replied that "I made wines for other people, as well as running my own winery, up through the 2003 vintage- I have always worked the equivalent of two to three full-time jobs- after which time I told myself that I really needed to slow down a bit and just focus on the wines here" at Corison Winery. But, she continued, in the first couple of vintages at her own winery, it was possible to moonlight with her own wines while still working full-time at Chappellet, as "the winemaking part is easy and seasonal" and "in those early years I was not selling wine yet or running a business- that's the hard part!" So she continued on as the head winemaker at Chappellet up through the 1989 vintage, as her first few vintages of Corison cabernet were quietly resting in the cellars getting ready for market, and when the 1987 vintage was finally ready for release, she parted ways with the Chappellet family and began the commercial history of Corison Winery. She recalls that in those first couple of vintages with her own winery, "I basically bought grapes and barrels instead of cars and houses," but when "I started my own project toward the end of my tenure at Chappellet, Donn Chappellet was very supportive."

One of the things that is so remarkable about Cathy Corison's cabernets is how cool and classic they are in profile, harkening back stylistically to the great Rutherford Bench wines made on the valley floor in the 1960s and 1970s, when so many other winemakers in Napa will tell you today that it is simply not possible in an era of global warming to make wines in that style anymore! This tenet, of course, is nonsense, as what would be more accurately the case is that it is not possible to make classically-styled, lower octane cabernets on the valley floor if one is going to crop at high levels to maximize return and therefore need to let the large number of bunches hang out on the vines until they are overripe in terms of sugar accumulation, so as to get the tannins of these high croploads mature. While I am fully sympathetic with those whose business plans require high yields to make financial ends meet, let's at least say that this is a

financial necessity for the winery, rather than hide behind the fig leaf of global warming and say it is no longer possible to make classically-styled wines on the Rutherford Bench. For Cathy Corison has been proving that it is indeed still possible to do so with all of the style and complexity that once made the Napa Valley such great cabernet sauvignon territory! And when we are declaring that the high yield, high octane, overripe style of cabernet is going to be the house style of a given winery, we do have to remember that a great, great many of the relative newcomers to vineyard ownership and winemaking in Napa Valley in the last quarter century come from very successful first careers and already have the financial resources to be able to crop at lower levels and make more classically styled wines, if they so choose, so that possibility is certainly available to far more producers here than current mythology would assert.

But, in any case, happily Cathy Corison is not one to follow the high octane crowd and produces some of the most hauntingly beautiful, classically-styled cabernets to be found in California today, never deviating from the style that has defined her wines from the very earliest days of her career and which were once the norm in Napa. As she likes to say, “I have been making wines here for nearly forty years and I like to think that my style has not really changed, as I have always been informed stylistically by the wines of Europe.” While elegance is the first description I think of when I reflect upon Cathy Corison’s superb cabernets, this is not to say that her wines lack for depth or muscle, as they typically find their equilibrium around 13.5 percent octane, which is certainly not shy in a global context, but which is pretty much where good, ripe vintages of Napa Valley cabernet have landed since at least the 1970s. As she has often said, “I strive to make wines that walk the fine line between power and elegance and will grace the table.” She notes that she has seen styles come and go since her arrival in the Napa Valley in the summer of 1975, but she has never been tempted to follow the high octane crowd that currently holds sway over much of the prime vineyard land in Napa, as the high alcohol style was certainly not the style that put California cabernet sauvignon on the world wine map at the Steven Spurrier tasting in Paris in 1976 and completely changed California’s winemaking fortunes from that day forward.

Cathy Corison recalls that “I fell in love with wine as a sophomore at Pomona College, when I took a wine appreciation course as a bit of a whim” and never looked back. Born and raised in San Jose, after graduating from Pomona with a degree in Biology in the spring of 1975, she loaded her Volkswagen Beetle with her belongings and headed back north from southern California for the Napa Valley. She started out working in a wine shop, but soon enrolled at UC-Davis and received her Master’s Degree in Oenology in 1978, with her first cellar internship taking place at Freemark Abbey Winery during the harvest of 1978. She comments that “when I started that internship at Freemark Abbey, I was probably the first woman to work in the cellars of a winery in Napa Valley in a very, very long time.” By 1980 she was the winemaker at Chappellet Vineyards on Pritchard Hill, following Tony Soter in this position (Tony was the winemaker at Chappellet from 1977 through the harvest of 1980) and making some of the top-rated cabernets in Napa during her time at Chappellet, which lasted until the 1989 vintage. She noted that working with “mountain fruit” at Chappellet actually led her to appreciate the quality of cabernet sauvignon grown on the Rutherford Bench, for in drought years, when they had difficulty with some of their vineyards on Pritchard Hill producing enough fruit for their needs, she would buy in grapes from vineyards on the Rutherford Bench and she began to really love the supple quality of the tannins and the “red and blue fruit” that she would find in the wines

produced from vineyards in this special section of the valley floor. This prompted her, once she decided to start her own project in the 1987 vintage, to use grapes exclusively from some of these top vineyards on the Rutherford Bench that she had become familiar with over the years at Chappellet.



Cathy Corison standing in her Kronos Vineyard in St. Helena on a very warm first day of September.

I was curious how Cathy was able to make the transition so seamlessly from the “mountain fruit” grown in the vineyards of Chappellet on Pritchard Hill to the Rutherford Bench fruit when she first started her own winery, but she observed that the stylistic shift was quite easy, as “in truth, I couldn’t make wines like Chappellet Cabernet down on the Bench.” She continues, “everything is different- flavor profile, quality of tannins and acid structure” and she had to be attuned to this and tailor her approach in the cellars to her new vineyard sources. But, her formative wine education had prepared her very well for this moment, as she is certainly a *terroirist* at heart, and she notes that “my job, anywhere I have worked, has been to let the vineyard speak.” While I have not tasted a lot of the vintages that Cathy produced during her tenure at Chappellet, it has been my impression that during her decade at the winemaking helm here, the wines were some of the most refined examples of “mountain fruit cabernet” as one could find in the decade of the 1980s, as they were never the bigger, more powerful style championed by Bob Travers up at Mayacamas or Al Brounstein at Diamond Creek in this era. It, of course, helped that she already had some experience working with purchased grapes from the

valley floor when the yields in the Chappellet vineyards were not sufficient to cover the needs of the winery and some was brought in to augment the estate production here, as she recalls that “during a severe drought in the 1980s I did have the opportunity to work with Bench-land fruit.” But, more importantly, Cathy has always had an old world philosophy when it came to winemaking, as she notes that “my goal has always been to make wines that were both powerful and elegant, that speak of place, grace the table and enjoy a long distinguished life” and it was this philosophical foundation that allowed her to hit the ground running with her beautifully refined 1987 Corison Cabernet Sauvignon.

Once she had left her position as the head winemaker at Chappellet and begun her own project on a full-time basis after the 1989 harvest, Cathy began to be approached by other vineyard owners to make their wines as well, with the Staglin family knocking on her door in time for Cathy to make the 1989 wines here. Staglin’s vineyards are located at the foot of the Mayacamas Mountains on the western side of the valley, so this was again a different style of fruit for her to work with than the Rutherford Bench vineyards that were serving as the basis for her own winery’s wines. As Cathy recalls, “I picked up Staglin to help make ends meet after I left Chappellet,” as starting a fledgling winery in the late 1980s in Napa Valley, where the emphasis was on elegant, classically-styled cabernets, just as the stylistic pendulum was being driven in the opposite direction towards big, powerful, high octane and overripe cabernets that dovetailed with what Robert Parker liked from Napa had to present a serious challenge in those very early years. Cathy made the wines at Staglin Vineyards for the two years of 1989 and 1990 as a consulting winemaker, which were the first two commercial releases from the winery and their very warm reception in the market helped Staglin quickly gain a following and further cemented Cathy Corison’s reputation as one of Napa’s top winemakers. Soon, she was also approached by other wineries to make their wines as well over the coming years, which led to her collaboration with York Creek Vineyards and Long Meadow Ranch.

Throughout her career, Cathy has made wines from a variety of different grapes, but her specialty seems to have always been cabernet sauvignon since the very earliest days of her career, so it is no surprise that cabernet sauvignon was the only wine she produced under her Corison Winery label. Her very first wines produced under her own name were labeled as “Napa Valley” cabernet sauvignon and hailed from vineyards between Rutherford and St. Helena in the heart of the Rutherford Bench area, flush up against the western hills. Her two earliest vineyard sources were the small, Hayne Vineyard (forty *ares*) and the Sunbasket Vineyard, which is 2.83 hectares in size. In 2016, Cathy and her husband William were able to purchase Sunbasket, after Cathy notes “I had sourced it, through three owners, and for twenty-eight years.” The Napa Valley bottling at Corison Winery has also included fruit from the nearby 3.64 hectare Grech Vineyard for many years as well. From 1987 through the 1995 vintage, Cathy only produced this single cabernet bottling at Corison Winery, and it was not until her purchase of the Kronos Vineyard in 1996 that she augmented the estate’s lineup with a second bottling from the old vine fruit here. Since 1996, Cathy has produced her two distinct bottlings of cabernet sauvignon, the original “Napa Valley” bottling made from a blend of fruit from these three different vineyards in St. Helena and Rutherford, as well as her single vineyard “Kronos” bottling from the home base vineyard next to the winery on Highway 29 in St. Helena. Since the 1999 vintage, she also produces a small amount of Gewurztraminer from purchased grapes in Sonoma County, which

she sells at the winery under a second label: “Corazón”. There is also an occasional dry Rosé produced under the same Corazón label, but I have never tasted a bottle.

The two Corison vineyards have been farmed organically since the very first day that Cathy took ownership of each. So, the Kronos Vineyard has been farmed this way since 1996 (or more accurately, December 31st of 1995, when the sale was finalized) and Sunbasket since 2016. Not surprisingly, Cathy Corison’s winemaking strategy is also quite non-interventionist, with just a bit of neutral cultured yeast used to start the fermentation and a gentle *elevage* for roughly twenty months in cask prior to bottling with moderate sulfur dioxide. Cathy notes that “I do inoculate for malolactic, though often they go of their own accord.” She is quick to mention that in the cellar “there are no recipes, but after all these years there are patterns” and “I rack quarterly in the first year,” while “in the second year racking varies depending on what the wine needs- it tells me when it needs a racking.” When I asked Cathy about her philosophy regarding fining and filtration of her wines, she noted that “they will often be fined with one egg white per barrel, a very traditional practice in Bordeaux,” but “they are filtered only when necessary for microbiological stability.” No additions of tartaric acidity, extraction enzymes, powdered tannins or other cellar “correction” techniques are used. Cathy notes that “I was taught to adjust acids at UC-Davis, but I have not used the technique for any of my wines since 1981,” preferring to just harvest a bit earlier to retain sound acidity in the grapes, rather than adding it in the cellars. Cathy notes that the Rutherford Bench soil foundation is perfect for allowing her to harvest a bit earlier than others around the Napa Valley, as these alluvial soils retain a well measured amount of water from the winter rains that allow the vines to mature nicely in the early part of the growing season and then turn their energy away from more vine growth and start to ripen the bunches, as they exhaust the subterranean water supply in mid-summer. While the Corison vineyards are outfitted with drip irrigation, this is used only very sparingly in times of drought to keep photosynthesis going properly and ensuring that vines do not shut down from hydric stress. Cathy amplifies this, noting that “I irrigate only to get the vines through nasty heat spikes late in the ripening season,” and “when I need to drip, I water deeply and infrequently to keep the roots way down in the soil scrounging for water.”

Prior to visiting the winery and spending some time with Cathy, I really had no idea if the two Corison cabernet sauvignon bottlings were treated any differently during their *elevage*, but it turns out that both wines are made pretty much the same. In terms of new oak for each wine, Cathy notes that “again, there is no recipe, but both wines tend to be aged in fifty percent new French oak,” with “the sources are very similar” for the barrels for each wine, but Cathy admits “I do tend to cherry-pick my favorite barrels for the Kronos.” The remainder of the casks used for the *elevage* of each wine are one wine barrels (which would be two years old when they are returned to the rotation for the next filling, as they would have housed their first wines for twenty or so months prior to bottling). The goal is clearly to keep the *terroir* front and center in the finished wines (which Cathy has done with admirable consistency since her very first vintage of 1987), with the oak playing a proper, supporting role in the aromatic and flavor profiles of the two wines. As Cathy notes, “here on these gravel pits” of the Rutherford Bench, “the vines produce complex fruit flavors- red cherries to blue blueberries through purple plums and cassis all the way to black blackberries- and velvety tannins, are aromatic and maintain snappy natural acidity” and it would be a shame to cover these elements up with too much new wood. In this day and age, where so much of the fruit from the prime Rutherford Bench vineyard land is buried

under cellar technique, heavy-oaking and late-harvest styles, it is easy to forget that this is one of the most important *terroirs* that put California front and center in the international wine world back in the decade of the 1970s.



The back of the barn-like Corison winery, as seen from the heart of the Kronos Vineyard.

However, the history of great Rutherford Bench cabernet dates back further than the blossoming decade of California wine's commercial success of the 1970s, as John Daniels' Inglenook Vineyard was producing some of California's finest wines as far back as the 1930s, and André Tchelistcheff's very long career at Beaulieu Vineyards always spoke so eloquently in the glass of the beauty of this great *terroir*. In addition to all of the beautiful fruit tones that cabernet produces here on this alluvial gravel bed, Rutherford Bench fruit also produces some of the most lovely spice tones one can find in mature California cabernet sauvignon, with a combination of allspice and nutmeg-like tones that have come to be known as "Rutherford Dust" (a term coined by André Tchelistcheff) when combined with the lovely soil tones found in classically-made wines from this *terroir*. All of these can be found displayed in mature vintages of Corison cabernet. The Rutherford Bench is the section of vineyard land that lies to the west of Highway 29, between the towns of Oakville and St. Helena (with Rutherford sandwiched between the two) and which runs from the highway west to the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains. It is only about seven miles long from north to south and only two miles or so wide. Besides the earliest pioneers here of Inglenook and Beaulieu Vineyards, Rutherford Bench fruit

is also where Joe Heitz based the foundation of his cabernet sauvignon fame, as the family's Napa Valley bottling was always primarily made up of Rutherford Bench fruit and both Bella Oaks Vineyard and Martha's Vineyard (the two earliest single vineyard bottlings from Heitz Wine Cellars) are also found on the Rutherford Bench. It is also where Robert Mondavi set up shop in 1966 and where Christian Moueix founded Dominus in 1983. It has been one of California's greatest *terroirs* for a long time and maybe one day, we will see a return stylistically to more wines that exalt in this *terroir*, rather than hiding it, but today, Cathy Corison's wines are by a very wide margin the most beautiful expressions of true Rutherford Bench cabernet sauvignon.

Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

The Napa Valley bottling of cabernet sauvignon from Cathy Corison was the sole wine produced here from 1987 to 1995, and though it now has to share the limelight with the Kronos Vineyard bottling, it is by no means always playing second fiddle. It is one of California's finest cabernets in its own right, with the three Rutherford Bench vineyards that comprise the fruit sources for this fine cuvée delivering great fidelity to the underlying *terroir* of the Rutherford Bench. Prior to speaking in depth with Cathy about her two cabernet sauvignons, I had always assumed that there was a slightly different treatment for this cuvée in the cellars here, as the wine is inevitably a bit more forward out of the blocks than the Kronos Vineyard bottling and will reach a proper stage of drinking in a shorter time frame (though it is always a long-lived wine as well and even the very first vintage from 1987 is only now getting to its true apogee of peak drinkability, thirty years out from the vintage!) and exudes charm, grace and Rutherford Dust spice tones from a fairly early age. Given that the Napa Valley bottling and the Kronos Vineyard cuvée are treated essentially the same in the cellars, one has to infer that the more structured profile of the Kronos out of the blocks is a reflection of the older vine age here, as well as a characteristic specific to the vineyard itself, rather than a result of conscious decisions Cathy makes in the cellar. As the notes below will attest, I have far deeper experience with the Napa Valley bottling of cabernet from Corison Winery than I do the Kronos, for this has been produced for a decade longer, and it is also easier to find the odd bottle of a mature vintage at auction, whereas most owners of Kronos seem to be fully aware of what they have in the cellar and the wine seldom pops up at auction! I tend to score this wine pretty close to the Kronos in most vintages when I am tasting the two in their youth, but my gut feeling is once the Kronos Vineyard bottling has had twenty-five or thirty years' worth of bottle age, the distance between the two bottlings might increase a bit. But, that said, the Corison Napa Valley is one of the great examples of cabernet sauvignon still to be found emanating from the Rutherford Bench.

2014 Corison Winery "Napa Valley "Cabernet Sauvignon

The new 2014 Napa Valley cabernet bottling from Cathy Corison smells fairly ripe for this cuvée when it is first opened, though the label comes in at the traditional 13.6 percent octane and the wine settles in nicely once it has had a chance to breath a bit. The bouquet is very expressive right out of the blocks this year, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of blueberry, violets, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones and a discreet framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a nice touch of incipient sappiness at the core, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced and promising finish. This looks likely to be a very elegant rendition of the Corison Napa

bottling in the fullness of time, but tuck this refined Rutherford Bench cabernet away for the next eight to ten years to allow the magic to unfold properly. 2025-2075. **92+**.

2013 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

A year’s worth of bottle age has certainly not done anything but enhance the perception of high quality in this top flight vintage from Cathy. The bouquet is starting to blossom nicely since I last tasted the wine in the spring of 2015, offering up a pure and nascently complex blend of black berries, black cherries, tobacco leaf, Rutherford dust, smoke, gravelly soil tones and a discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and strikingly pure on the attack, with a fine core, ripe tannins and a beautifully balanced, long and utterly seamless finish. This is really a stunning bottle in the making and all it needs is time in the cellar to come into its own. 2028-2070+. **94+**.

2012 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

I was very sorry to miss the opportunity to celebrate Cathy Corison’s twenty-fifth harvest, as the winery organized tastings on both the east and west coasts to commemorate the milestone by opening every vintage that she has produced at her own winery, and I was in Europe at the time of both events! In any event, her 2012 “Napa” cabernet sauvignon, which is her twenty-sixth vintage here, is really a beautiful wine, tipping the scales at a very refined 13.9 percent alcohol and offering up an utterly classic bouquet of red and black cherries, tobacco smoke, beautiful spice tones, a touch of currant leaf, Rutherford dust and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and marvelously elegant, with a lovely core, superb soil signature, nascent complexity and excellent focus and grip on the very long, ripely tannic and impeccably balanced finish. This wine will age brilliantly! *Tout en finesse*. 2022-2055+. **94**.

2011 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

Cathy Corison’s 2011 cabernet sauvignon is her twenty-fifth harvest at her own winery, and not surprisingly the queen of Napa Valley elegance has produced a stellar wine in the cooler year of 2011. The wine is a ripe, but suave 13.7 percent and wafts from the glass in a stellar constellation of red and black cherries, a fair bit of Rutherford Dust, tobacco leaf, beautiful soil tones, a hint of eucalyptus, fresh herb tones and a very refined base of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, a superb core of fruit, absolutely seamless balance, great focus and complexity and a very long, youthful and ripely tannic finish of impeccable focus and grip. This is a very young and refined Napa cabernet that will be spectacular in the fullness of time and is very much worthy of marking Madame Corison’s twenty-fifth anniversary at her own property. What I love about the Corison cabernets, year in and year out, is that they inevitably take me back to my formative years in the wine trade, when I bought and cellared a ton of Napa cabernets and fell in love both with the style of the region (back in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s) and with the larger wine world in general. The 2011 is one of Cathy Corison’s finest young vintages that I have had the pleasure to taste, which is saying something, considering this remarkable woman’s superb track record for classic Napa cabernets! 2023-2050+. **95**.

2010 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

Cathy Corison’s 2010 wines have shown beautifully since release and I was very happy to have the chance to revisit the 2010 Napa Valley bottling when I was out at the winery in early September of 2016. This wine remains young and very promising on both the nose and palate, offering up a lovely bouquet of black cherries, a touch of cocoa, lovely soil tones, cigar smoke, a dollop of wild bay leaf and that signature, understated Corison new oak treatment. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, long and elegant in personality, with excellent mid-palate depth, superb

focus and balance and a long, fine-grained tannic finish of very promising beauty. This vintage came in at 13.6 percent alcohol, which allows for all of the purity of fruit, coupled to fine soil signature that make this vintage so lovely at Corison. 2024-2060. **93.**

2009 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

One wishes that there were more cabernet producers in Napa Valley that think along the lines of Cathy Corison, as her 2009 Cabernet Sauvignon comes in at a very cool and classy 13.6 percent alcohol and has the purity and complexity to prove that lower octane is where true quality is found in Napa. The resulting wine is really superb, offering up a deep and very classy bouquet of red and black cherries, allspice, tobacco leaf, a touch of red plum, lovely, Rutherford soil tones, fresh thyme and a deft framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and potentially quite velvety in texture, with excellent focus and nascent complexity, fine-grained tannins, good acids and really exceptional length and grip on the perfectly balanced and elegant finish. This will need a good decade (at least) to really blossom and realize all of its potential, but it is going to be a superb bottle of cabernet in the fullness of time. Kudos to Cathy Corison for making such old school, classy and ageworthy cabernet in today’s crazy world of Napa Valley! 2023-2055. **94.**

2008 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 2008 Napa cabernet from Kathy Corison is a really beautiful young bottle of wine. The alcohol content here tips the scales at a very respectable 13.8 percent, which keeps the wine cool on the palate and very light on its feet. The deep and youthfully complex nose wafts from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, dark chocolate, a nice touch of Rutherford dust, woodsmoke, gentle notes of violet and a judicious framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and very suave on the attack, with a classy base of soil, lovely mid-palate depth, fine-grained tannins and lovely length and grip on the focused and elegant finish. This is my kind of Napa cabernet! 2017-2040. **93.**

2006 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

My visit out to St. Helena in September of last year afforded my first opportunity to taste the 2006 vintage from Cathy Corison and, not surprisingly, the Napa bottling was lovely. The wine is a bit more black fruity in personality than is typical of this cuvée, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cassis, a hint of black cherry, cigar smoke, beautiful Rutherford Bench soil tones, violets and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite deep at the core, with a beautifully refined structural chassis, lovely focus and grip, still a touch of firmness to the well-integrated tannins and impressive length on the complex finish. This is still several years away from really blossoming from behind its structure, but will be outstanding with a bit more patience. 2023-2060+. **93+.**

2005 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 2005 vintage was a cooler year, with September quite unseasonably chilly and the harvest coming in nearly a month late in Napa. Not surprisingly, the longer hang time and more moderate ripeness of the vintage has dovetailed beautifully with the elegant style of Cathy Corison’s wines, producing a very refined, youthful and classic wine in the making. The deep and complex nose shows a “cooler” fruit profile of cassis, dark berry, tobacco leaf, fresh herb tones, a lovely and striking base of soil and a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary, with a lovely core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the black fruity and still youthful finish. Give this very promising wine another five or six years in the cellar to allow the tannins to fall away and the nose and palate to really blossom. It will be a lovely wine. 2017-2040. **91+.**



2001 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

2001 is an excellent vintage for Napa cabernets and the '01 Corison is a superb example of this outstanding year. The deep and sappy nose jumps from the glass in a still youthful mélange of red and black cherries, a touch of plum, Rutherford dust, tobacco smoke, cocoa powder, a gentle whisper of mint and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and silky on the attack, with beautiful mid-palate depth, bright acids, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the sappy and still quite primary finish. Texturally, this lovely 2001 cabernet is not too far from peak drinking, but in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity, it is still in the developmental stage and another three to five years of bottle age are really going to pay dividends in terms of blossoming. 2021-2060. **94+**.

1999 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1999 vintage was difficult on the Rutherford Bench and this is a vintage that Cathy is not overly fond of, but the staff at the winery likes it pretty well and was showing it as an example of a more mature vintage for visitors in their tasting room at the time of my visit. While it is a bit atypical in style for the winery, it is a very good wine, offering up a complex and quite black fruity nose of cassis, black cherries, a hint of road tar, cigar ash and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, black fruity and complex on the attack, with its full-bodied format now defined by melting tannins and very good length and grip. This does not have the charm of most vintages of the Corison “Napa” bottling, but in the context of a challenging vintage, the wine has really turned out pretty nicely. 2016-20356. **90**.

1996 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1996 vintage produced a small crop, due to problems at flowering, and first half of year was hot; cooler days and nights from veraison forward made the vintage into an absolute classic. This was the 10th Anniversary bottling for Ms. Corison and the wine is aging beautifully, wafting from the glass in a blossoming constellation of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, Rutherford Bench spice tones redolent of allspice and nutmeg, incipient notes of chipotles and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a lovely focus and balance, a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Starting to drink well today, the 1996 Corison cabernet sauvignon will continue to age gracefully for another thirty years. 2015-2045+. **94.**

1988 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1988 Corison cabernet is still a few years away from its absolute apogee, but at age twenty-four, it is certainly no crime to be pulling corks now! The deep, pure and utterly classic Rutherford Bench bouquet offers up a complex mélange of red and black cherries, Cuban cigars, hints of summer truffle, beautiful soil tones, Rutherford dust notes of allspice and clove and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very suave, with a great core of fruit, superb focus and balance, melting tannins, tangy acids and a really lovely sense of elegance on the seamless and very, very long finish. This will be even better in another four or five years, but man, this is really delicious right now. Utterly classic and old school! 2012-2030+. **93.**

1987 Corison Winery “Napa Valley” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 1987 Corison cabernet is one of the finest vintages from Cathy Corison that I have had the pleasure to taste. The deep, refined and complex nose is just starting to really hit its apogee, offering up a complex blend of black cherries, a touch of plum, Rutherford Dust, tobacco, fresh herb tones, a dollop of fresh nutmeg, incipient notes of nutskin, woodsmoke, allspice and a delicate base of spicy new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with a beautiful core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good acids, and stunning focus and balance on the nascently complex and very classy finish. This is still a fairly young wine, and while it is a total joy to drink today, it is clearly still climbing and will only be better with more bottle age. A great and utterly classic Rutherford Bench cabernet and a stunningly impressive first vintage that augured so well for things to come! 2013-2045. **96.**

Kronos Vineyard

These forty-five year-old vines produce one of California’s most complete and elegant examples of cabernet sauvignon, and younger vintages of Kronos Vineyard from Cathy Corison are so beautifully embedded stylistically in the great Napa cabernets of yesteryear that they would probably be hard to spot if one could transport back a bottle of the 2011 or 2012 to the year of 1985 and open it up with a lineup of 1978s! Of course, Cathy Corison would debate my hypothesis, arguing convincingly that viticultural practices today in Kronos are so far ahead of what was being done when she first apprenticed at Freemark Abbey that a sophisticated modern cabernet like her Kronos Vineyard bottling would stand out like a sore thumb because of such superior farming. Her point would be very well-taken, but I still get the same thrill tasting bottles of Kronos that I did with those great old wines of yesteryear back in the day when the wines and I were both far younger! I should note that my recent tasting experience with Cathy’s Kronos Vineyard bottling only dates back to the 2007 vintage (the bottle of 2005 that she generously opened at the winery was undone by a bad cork and not reviewable), so I have not yet tasted a

mature bottle from this superbly-situated vineyard in St. Helena. But, I have tasted enough of the more recent vintages to know with absolute certainty that this is one of the greatest bottlings of cabernet sauvignon produced today in California, with bottomless depth of fruit, striking soil signature and the perfect synthesis of power and elegance that Cathy Corison seeks in her examples of cabernet sauvignon. The last three vintages of Kronos to be released, 2013, 2012 and the tremendously underrated 2011 seem to indicate that this bottling is starting to reach its apogee of expression now that Cathy has had more than fifteen vintages to really get to know this vineyard, and they are truly brilliant wines in the making!

My thinking about the Corison Kronos Vineyard bottling has evolved over the last several years, which may reflect just more experience with this cuvée on my part, or perhaps another indication that this bottling is now reaching its zenith of expression in the last several vintages. I used to be convinced that the qualitative difference between this and the beautiful Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon bottling was not tremendous, with the Kronos just offering up a bit more structural precision and the capability of even a longer life in bottle than the Napa. However, I now feel that this is not accurate, as the Kronos Vineyard bottling has shown quite a bit more depth of fruit at the core in recent times than the Napa (probably a reflection of those forty-five year-old vines), as well as even more elegance and inherent complexity. While I have been a huge fan of the Napa Valley bottling from Cathy since her inaugural vintage of 1987, there is little doubt in my mind these days that the Kronos Vineyard is a step up- perhaps a significant step up- in quality from the excellent Napa and it is clearly now one of the greatest bottlings of cabernet sauvignon produced in the pantheon of California classical cabernets. To my palate, today the Kronos Vineyard bottling belongs right up at the very pinnacle of traditionally-styled cabernet cuvées, alongside of Ridge “Monte Bello”, Heitz “Martha’s Vineyard”, classic Mayacamas and the like. It is strongly deserving of a California First Growth classification, if one is ever established for north coast cabernets.

2013 Corison Winery “Kronos Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

The just released 2013 Kronos Vineyard cabernet sauvignon from Cathy Corison is an absolute classic in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and absolutely riveting, soaring from the glass in a blend of black cherries, sweet cassis, Cuban cigars, a classic base of Rutherford Bench soil tones, a touch of allspice and a very sophisticated framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full and utterly suave on the attack, with glorious depth at the core, remarkable soil inflection for such a young cabernet, ripe seamless tannins and stunning focus and balance on the very, very long and very elegant finish. This is still a very young wine, but when it is ready for primetime drinking, it is going to be one of the legends of the last twenty years of Napa cabernet! The 2013 Kronos tips the scales at 13.4 percent octane and truly deserves the moniker of the Lafite-Rothschild of Napa! 2027-2075+. **96.**

2012 Corison Winery “Kronos Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

I had not tasted the 2012 Kronos Vineyard from Cathy Corison since its release in the spring of 2015 and was very happy that it was in our lineup at the winery in September. I loved this wine out of the blocks and it was showing brilliant potential at the winery, soaring from the glass in a beautiful, young aromatic blend of red and black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, Rutherford dust, tobacco leaf and a very suave base of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core of sappy fruit, great focus and grip, fine-grained tannins and exquisite balance on the very, very long and refined finish. This is, of course,

still a very young wine, but it will be one of the defining wines of Cathy's illustrious career when all is said and done! 2030-2075+. **96.**



2011 Corison Winery “Kronos Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

I know that the 2011 vintage of north coast cabernet sauvignon was not particularly popular in many circles, but I have found this cooler vintage utterly captivating at most of my favorite estates and fully expect it to be the great sleeper vintage of its era. The 2011 Kronos Vineyard bottling from Corison is a bit lower in octane than most vintages, coming in at an even thirteen percent, but the wine has a very dynamic personality on both the nose and palate and is going to be absolutely stunning with sufficient time in the cellar. The bouquet is extremely precise and nascently complex, delivering scents of black cherries, dark plums, tobacco leaf, classy soil tones, cigar ash, allspice, hints of violet and a discreet framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins, excellent acidity and lovely backend soil signature on the very, very long, vibrant and complex finish. Though the 2011 Kronos is still a very young wine, it is already showing some lovely, old vine backend sappiness that is going to define this wine when it is ready to drink! 2027-2070. **95.**

2007 Corison Winery “Kronos Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

The 2007 Kronos Vineyard cabernet from Corison is a lovely bottle that stays nicely under the fourteen percent threshold of alcohol, tipping the scales at 13.8 percent. The deep,

complex and very pure nose offers up a classy mélange of black cherries, cigar smoke, a nice touch of fresh herbs, a beautiful base of Rutherford Bench soil tones, a dollop of dried eucalyptus and a stylish base of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and youthfully elegant, with a fine core of fruit, ripe tannins, excellent focus and superb length and grip on the pure and beautifully balanced finish. This is a fine, fine bottle in the making. 2015-2040. **93.**

THE ANNUAL MATURE RED BURGUNDY REPORT AND A LITTLE BURGUNDY MARKET HISTORY



Every year or so I try to write a piece on older red Burgundies that I have drunk in recent times, just to keep the balance in the journal between new releases and properly mature wines on target. I used to drink a lot more old red Burgundy than I do these days, as the price of admission has gone up exponentially in the last half dozen years and my journalistic salary has hardly kept pace, so more often than not, these days it is either bottles I still have in my cellar from the old days or through the generosity of friends that I get to drink properly mature red Burgundies. At one point in my life, probably nine out of every ten red wines that I drank was from Burgundy, but my tasting responsibilities now range far wider than they once did and now a bottle of fully mature Burgundy on my table is a far less frequent, but still always satisfying, occurrence. However, as the notes below will attest, I still do drink quite a bit of mature red Burgundy each year! My own stocks in the cellar are getting a bit thinner than they used to be, which finds me far more selective about opening bottles and makes me wonder if all the old red Burgs I blew through at Paulées and other Burgundy bacchanals in the past were really well spent, but I still retain more than enough to keep me going and there are a few old Burgundy dinners on the calendar each year that I manage to attend, so the notes keep amassing, even as the remaining old wines from the region continue to get more scarce and more dear. The one nice thing about

having cut my teeth on older Burgundies in my relative youth is that they were not yet the target of wine counterfeiters the way they have been in recent times and one really did not have to worry too much about the authenticity of most of the wines that we drank back in those days, for other than the wines of Henri Mayer, Leroy and DRC, counterfeiters generally did not seem to feel that Burgundy was worth the risk. Of course, all that changed with Rudi and his accomplices and the playing field is far more difficult to navigate today than was the case twenty years ago.

Over the last several years, I have also found that the quality of the bottles of really older red Burgundy that are out on the market has fallen for a variety of reasons, above and beyond the issue of potential counterfeiting of older wines. As one long-time Burgundy-loving friend commented at a tasting last year, "I think we need to come to terms with the fact that we and our friends have drunk up an awful lot of the truly great old bottles that were out on the market back in the day, and one is not going to find the same pedigree and provenance in older red Burgundy bottles as was once the case and our extended group is certainly part of the reason for this." His point is very well-taken, as Burgundy is a far more finite commodity than Bordeaux and for the general run of old Burgs in the marketplace, the odds are far less good today than in yesteryear in coming upon great old wines in pristine condition, unless they are priced in the stratosphere. The massive uptick in prices for old Burgundy has certainly brought a few more pristine bottles out of cellars, as long-time collectors will sometimes be tempted by today's prices to part with great old bottles, but the sidebar to this phenomenon is that an awful lot of second and third rate bottlings are now out in the market for prices that are less than the blue chip bottlings, but generally still do not warrant the prices they command, given their indifferent quality since day one. I have far more notes these days on old, shoddy and cracking up red Burgundies, sometimes from domaines or négociants that I had never even heard of in the past, and so many of these wines are either over the hill or never had a chance at positive evolution from the outset because of such poor winemaking back in the day. Sometimes I wonder how merchants can sell them and still sleep at night. Most of these I never bother to score and they will not be found in the notes below, but casualty rates at old Burgundy tastings are way up in my experience over the last six or seven years.

Part of the reason for the general decline in great old bottles of Burgundy in the marketplace has to do with their relative scarcity in the first place and the insatiable thirst of collectors of my generation doing a lot of collective consumption of old bottles when the wines were still relatively prevalent, but also since 2007, the rise in prices across the board for Burgundy has brought in a completely new set of Burgundy lovers into the market who simply do not have a lot of previous experience with the wines from the region. It is understandable that they too would like to drink their share of old Burgs from the '40s, '50s and '60s and build a base of tasting experience on which to judge their cellar of younger vintages, but due to their relative dearth of experience, they are willing to take chances on older bottles from less well-respected domaines and négociants, if the appellations on the labels of the bottles are respectable. A lot of these second and third division bottles are still around because no one of my generation would have ever considered buying them when they were offered, unless they were virtually free, and as the difference in prices between the third rate juice and the great domaines was not all that dramatic twenty years ago, the top producers wines were happily bought and the middling producers' old bottles just sat in cellars and on merchants lists untouched. There is, of course, always the occasional diamond in the rough to be found, but most of these minor

producers' wines with which I occasionally cross paths today are simply confirmation that I was very well-served to pay them no attention back in the day.

There is also a lack of institutional memory in the market for many of these second division Burgundies, some of which fell from grace back in my early days in the wine market, such as Bernard Grivelet, and yet I see them come around in the market again every ten years or so in the hopes of finding newbies in the market that do not know about their questionable authenticity. A quick scan of the web found old vintages of Grivelet wines offered from Los Angeles to Switzerland in copious quantities! For those who do not know the story of these wines, older vintages from the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s were very prevalent in the Burgundy markets here on the east coast in the 1980s, with good quantities of rarities such as Chambolle "les Amoureuses" and host of grand crus all available as late releases from the property in very desirable vintages such as 1959, 1961, 1962, 1964, 1966, 1969 and 1971. Before my arrival in the New York market at the end of the 1980s, I had never heard the back story about these wines, but had sampled many at tastings in New England and had found them uniformly poor. Collectors I tasted with back then were in the midst of trying to return them to the merchants they had purchased them from originally. Once arriving in New York, I was treated to the story by veterans in the wine trade here in the city of cases and cases of unlabeled Grivelet arriving at their importer's warehouse and labels being applied as orders came in- so that the bottles of '64 Amoureuses that you ordered were exactly the same as the bottles of '59 or '61 or '71, and none of them were Amoureuses or even likely to be Chambolle-based pinot noir! According to these New York trade veterans, eventually the authorities stopped this scam and the New York importer was sent to jail, but most of those wines are still out there and pop up on auction catalogues and rare wine lists in cyclical fashion, looking for new victims thirty years after the crime. So Burgundy fraud in the market was around long before Laurent Ponsot stood up at Acker Merrall and stopped Rudi and Company in their tracks.

The Grivelet bottlings were hardly the only "old wines" from the region that had authenticity issues back in the 1980s, as Remoissenet was another source of older vintages at this time that seemingly were shown to not be what they claimed to be on the label. As the story was told to me by his Boston-based importer at the time, Rolland Remoissenet was alleged to have systematically topped up his older wines in the cellar with younger vintages, to keep the number of older bottles robust (rather than sacrificing a few of the oldies to top up lower fill levels with the same wines), so the '64 or '69 Richebourg that you ordered when they came along was likely to have plenty of younger juice in the blend. A similar issue seems to have affected many older wines at Bouchard Père et Fils in this era as well, eventually leading to the sale of the *maison* to Joseph Henriot. To be fair to the Remoissenet wines at this time, their quality was significantly above those of the Grivelet wines of the same era, and my gut instinct is that the older wines were at least topped up with younger red Burgundies (which, to my palate, was not necessarily the case with the Grivelet wines), but they were still not what they purported to be on the label. And again, this seems to have been institutionally forgotten, as I was just served a 1959 Grands Echézeaux from Remoissenet a couple of months ago here in New York, indicating that some of these allegedly adulterated wines that were widely available in the 1980s are still out and about in the market. True to what I remember of the purportedly older Remoissenet wines I drank back in the 1980s, the wine seemed to be a mix of younger and older juice.

As I wrote about in some depth in the feature on Clos Vougeot a couple of years ago, the practice of blending additional wines into Burgundy prior to bottling is no new phenomenon, as it was practiced fairly widely back in the days when so much Burgundy was still sold from the proprietors in cask, to be either blended into larger cuvées by négociants or bottled by merchants in their home ports when the casks arrived. It has been widely discussed in many books about the old days of the London wine trade that consumers seventy-five or a hundred years ago in England preferred their red Burgundies to be more robust in style than may have necessarily been typical of most vintages in those pre-climate change times, and a judicious addition of wines such as Gigondas or something equally broad-shouldered to a cask of Clos Vougeot or Nuits St. Georges was often just what the market wanted in their Burgundy bottles. And of course, this practice was hardly particular to London merchants, as many of the old Dr. Barolet négociant bottlings that I have drunk also seemed to have been “boosted” a bit by some more robust wine in the blend. In some cellars, it might be a bottle or two of *Crème de Cassis* that would be used to sweeten up the mid-palate and darken the color of a cask of a lighter vintage Burgundy. Veteran Burgundy collectors whom I first started tasting with in my early days in the wine trade told me that they could often spot a certain famous Vosne-Romanée domaine’s wines from the fifties or sixties at blind tastings by notes of Cognac-like spices in the wines, as sugar was hard to come by for chapitalization in the leanest post-war years and Cognac was alleged to have sometimes been used to boost up the alcohol in certain vintages.

So, there have been pitfalls and challenges aplenty to buying older Burgundies for far longer than Rudi and Associates have been around, and the ethical compasses of some merchants and négociants down through the years have not always been readily apparent. I remember tasting a slew of older wines from Maison Leroy back in the mid-1990s that hailed from vintages of the ‘60s, ‘70s and early ‘80s that seemed to my palate to be quite different in quality from the customary high levels of the family’s négociant bottlings from that era, and which hailed from different vineyards than was traditional for the family firm to buy wines from in those decades. This was right after all of the controversy and upheaval in Madame Leroy’s business arrangements, as Lalou had been voted out as a director from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti shortly before for reportedly selling her allocation of Romanée-Conti bottles solely to Japan at extraordinarily high prices (Japanese economic elites at this time had an absolute fixation with Romanée-Conti and did not really care all that much about La Tâche or the other DRC bottlings) and then dumping the other crus in the grey market. Maison Leroy, just prior to this scandal had held the world-wide distribution rights to the wines of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, exclusive of the United States (where Wilson-Daniels had the monopoly of DRC wholesale distribution), and when these were taken away, I have to assume it caused a serious economic cataclysm in the Maison Leroy business for a few years. And this was in addition to her just having spent a fortune to form her Domaine Leroy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. So after all of this turmoil, the market started to see wines like 1980 Ruchottes-Chambertin from Maison Leroy emerging from the cellars and not really dazzling in quality.

Given that buying older red Burgundies has always been a skill that required a fair degree of experience and historical background with the region, not to mention really good connections in the Burgundy trade, it behooves today’s relatively new Burgundy collectors to keep this in mind when shopping for a few older vintages to augment their fine cellar of younger wines. If you do a quick scan of the internet and find that Bernard Grivelet has great vineyard holdings

such as Amoureuses, Clos de Bèze, Clos Vougeot and Bonnes-Mares in all the top vintages from 1978 back to 1947 still available for sale, ask yourself why this is the case. How could these wines have not been gobbled up by Burgundy collectors decades ago? The obvious answer is because they are not any good, and the alleged scandal outlined above was once well-known to collectors and merchants alike back in the day. But memories fade. Occasionally a few old bottles might still emerge from Burgundy domaines' cellars for the market, as today's prices tease out the odd bottle now and then, but do remember that it was very, very rare, back in the lean post-war years in the region for producers to have the financial wherewithal to hold back bottles of their best crus to drink or sell thirty or forty years down the road. Budgets were simply too tight for that generation of Burgundians in the vast majority of cases (a few négociants might have been secure enough financially in those very hard post-war years to keep top wines, but few others) to be able to salt away any significant number of bottles of their top wines, and this was particularly true in the most highly-regarded vintages, where market demand was strong for the wines. Most of the bottles simply had to be sold to make ends meet and have enough money to finance next year's growing season. And general Burgundy financial fortunes did not start to really get rosier until the late 1980s and 1990s.

So what would I do, if I were only a decade or so into my Burgundy journey and wanted some mature wines to drink from the region, so that my cache of 2005-2014 could rest comfortably for a suitable period of time in the cellar without my leading bottles to slaughter years before their time? First, I would pay a lot of attention to the very good, but more forward vintages of red Burgundy in recent times, with the 2007 vintage in particular being a focal point. There is so much pleasure to be had from this vintage from the successful estates, and there are tons of these, and the wines are already tasty and only going to become more so in the coming years. They are the perfect prescription for a younger cellar of top flight Burgundies that really deserve many more years' worth of bottle age! I learned so much about Burgundy back in my formative days from vintages such as 1987, which offered up classic expressions of their respective *terroirs* in a more forward format (and quite affordable prices as well) that allowed me to drink very well indeed, increase my knowledge exponentially, and most importantly, allow those 1988s, 1989s, 1991s and 1993s to continue to sleep unmolested in my cellar. The 2011s will eventually offer a similar experience to the 2007s, and if you dip back a bit further, both 2001s and 2000s (if you can find them) are also really drinking well and can supply a far more "real" Burgundian experience than an adulterated Clos de Bèze from 1971 or 1969.

If I were going to dip my toe in the waters of far more mature vintages and bottles, then I would try to select my wines within the context of the economic realities of that era in Burgundy. Look for bottles from respected négociants who would have had the solid financial foundation to hold back some wines. Producers such as Maison Joseph Drouhin and Maison Joseph Faiveley would be a couple from the '60s and '70s that would still be good bets for searching out older bottles, and Louis Latour and Pierre Bourée were making very good wines in this era as well. Maison Louis Jadot was also doing very, very good work in this day and age, but I do not see their older bottles out on the market with anywhere near as much frequency as I do those from Maisons Drouhin and Faiveley, so perhaps they were not holding back a percentage of their production in those days? Also, do not turn up your nose at less highly-regarded appellations from blue chip producers from this epoch, as there is a lot more magic in a bottle of Louis Trappet premier cru from 1971 or 1972 than there is in a shoddy négociant bottling of Richebourg from

1964. The twin towers in Nuits St. Georges, Domaines Cheillon and Gouges should also be high priorities. Also, do not forget the Côte de Beaune, led of course, by the incomparable Domaine Michel Gaunoux, perhaps one of the wine world's foremost sources for old Burgundies of unquestionably high quality. Also pay attention to Savigny-lès-Beaune, whose wines age far longer than is generally acknowledged. I have drunk some magical Simon Bize wines from the 1970s and lovely Maison Drouhin Savignys going all the way back to the 1960s. Corton is another great commune to focus on from the old days, as the wines demand time in the bottle to blossom and are hardly likely to be targets of counterfeiters.

Of course, none of this advice is necessary if one has adequately deep enough pockets to chase great old bottles of blue chip producers such as Domaines Rousseau, Roumier, Dujac, Mugneret-Gibourg, DRC and the like at today's prices, but do keep in mind that these wines are also on the radar of the most sophisticated counterfeiters these days. Laurent Ponsot made this abundantly clear. If shopping for old vintages of blue chip domaines, again, shop logically. Know your merchant, if possible, and make sure you can return wines if provenance becomes a potential issue. Secondly, keep an eye peeled for the less desirable appellations, as it is far more enjoyable to drink a pristine, old vintage of Roumier Clos Vougeot or Mugneret-Gibourg Nuits St. Georges "Chaignots" or DRC Grands Echézeaux than a faked bottle of Musigny or La Tâche. And once you secure great old bottles of Burgundy, make sure that you treat them with the respect that they deserve. Old red Burgundy is a fairly fragile creature structurally, and shipping of old wines also demands that they be given plenty of recovery time before they are opened and drunk, if you are looking for the true magic in the bottle and not just trying to impress with an old label. Six months of recovery time is a minimum in my book, and a year is far better, to allow the wines to settle back into harmony and balance. When it is time to drink the bottle, don't serve the sludge! If the bottle is going to be shared with more than a couple of people, decant it off of its forty or fifty years' worth of sediment. If the bottle is going to be served at home, you can decant it right before serving, if you are worried about its fading, and if you are bringing the bottle to a restaurant to share, double-decant it before you leave home and just hit the wine with a bit of argon gas to keep it fresh until you serve it. Even Burgundies from the forties or fifties will hold up nicely for many hours if you do this and you will not then end up serving a muddled bottle from the sediment having been kicked up into solution. Bottles of great old red Burgundy are getting rarer and rarer, so do not waste them through slipshod preparation prior to serving!

Most of the notes that follow hail from the last eighteen months or so, but I came inexplicably upon a tasting book from the end of 2009 that included quite a few notes on older red Burgundies that I had not published in past versions of this report. Strangely, I had written up notes on about half of the wines from that particular Paulée that I attended, but had not done anything with the remainder of the notes, and I include them here, if their windows of drinkability were sufficiently long-term to expect the wines to still be in fine shape today. I have no idea why I wrote up only half of the notes from this tasting back in 2010, when I should have reported on all of the wines, but back office efficiency has never been my strong suit. These notes can easily be spotted below by projected windows of drinkability that start at 2009. The tasting notes below are listed first chronologically, from youngest vintage to oldest, with 1985 being the vintage that I started with this time. Within each vintage grouping, the wines are listed from north to south geographically.



1985 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

The 1985 Clos de Bèze from Maison Drouhin is a lovely example of the vintage that is now fully into its apogee of peak maturity, but has the depth and structural integrity to still cruise long for at least a couple of decades and maybe longer. The complex nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of red and black cherries, heather, *sous bois*, mustard seed, a touch of venison, coffee and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, refined and tangy, with superb complexity, very good depth at the core, melted tannins and a long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. A very elegant and intensely flavored example of Clos de Bèze at its zenith. 2016-2040+. **94.**

1985 Clos St. Denis- Domaine Dujac

I had not drunk a bottle of this in several years and was delighted when our vertical of Dujac Clos de la Roche last year, which I reported on a few issues back, included a bottle of the 1985 Clos St. Denis as a point of comparison. The wine is absolutely lovely, and like so many of the 1985s, has passed through its relatively delicate stage of evolution and seems deeper and a bit more powerful in style today than the last bottle I drank six or eight years ago. The bouquet shows off all of the inherent elegance and spicy complexity of this great *terroir*, wafting from the glass in a blend of red plums, cherries, cocoa powder, cinnamon, a gorgeously complex base of soil, woodsmoke and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with great complexity, a fine core of red fruit and lovely length and grip on the soil-driven, tangy and meltingly tannic finish. This wine will continue to age beautifully, based

on its exquisite balance, as the tannins are started to fall away completely, but there remains plenty of structure to carry it far into the future as well. A beautiful wine. 2016-2045. **95.**

1978 Chambertin- Domaine Louis Trapet

Back in this era, Monsieur Trapet produced two bottlings of Chambertin, a regular and a “Vieilles Vignes” cuvée. Not surprisingly, it did not prove to be a great marketing success, as most clients would clamor for the Vieilles Vignes bottling, if they were aware of its existence and eventually the domaine decided to revert back to producing simply a single cuvée of Chambertin. So, this beautiful 1978 Chambertin would have been the *normale* back in this era and the one that most clients would not have wanted, but the wine has aged beautifully and is now drinking with great style and complexity. The bouquet offers up a very refined and perfumed constellation of cherries, strawberries, raw cocoa, nutskin, a complex base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still had plenty of mid-palate depth, with outstanding complexity, fine focus and grip and a very long, meltingly tannic and energetic finish. I have never had the 1978 Vieilles Vignes version, but based on this superb bottle of the regular Chambertin, I would love to taste it! 2016-2035+. **93.**

1978 Clos de la Roche- Maison Pierre Bourée

A few years ago I had the pleasure to drink this wine out of magnum, and this most recent bottle was every bit as enjoyable and vibrant as the wine was out of magnum. I should probably have saved this note for my feature on Hubert Lignier, as I understand that this wine was purchased from Monsieur Lignier back in the day. In any event, the wine is a very pretty and classic example of this great vintage, offering up scents of cherries, gamebird, *sous bois*, coffee, bonfires and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a robust personality, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. Lovely juice. 2015-2035. **92+.**

1976 Griotte-Chambertin- Domaine Fourrier

Jean-Marie Fourrier’s father made really lovely wines in his era at the head of the family domaine in Gevrey-Chambertin, and these are some of the most delicate and hauntingly perfumed wines to be found from this epoch in Burgundy. The 1976 Griotte from Domaine Fourrier is a lovely bottle and does not possess any of the issues of tough, immobile tannins that plague so many of the wines from this vintage. The bouquet is pretty, red fruity and very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of wild strawberries, cherries, forest floor, summer truffles, coffee, a touch of bonfires and a distinctive topnote of cinnamon. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and autumnal in profile, with a good, solid core, sound, well-integrated acids, melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex, middleweight finish. This is not a blockbuster, but rather, a very nice, red fruity and extremely polite 1976 Burg! 2016-2035. **91.**

1976 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg (served from methusalem)

The 1976 Clos Vougeot from Dr. Georges Mugneret was drinking beautifully out of this large bottle, with still just a touch of the vintage’s tannin apparent on the backend of the wine, but with far better balance than ninety percent of the ‘76s out there. The bouquet is classic, mature Mugneret Clos Vougeot, wafting from the glass in a mix of roasted cherries, *sous bois*, heather, bonfires, summer truffles, a touch of cinnamon, gamebird and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite vibrant, with a lovely core of fruit, impressive soil complexity and very good length and grip on the tangy and very nicely balanced

finish. This is lovely, and particularly in such a large format, where one can share with lots of friends and still get a second glass! 2015-2035+. **93.**

1976 Volnay “Clos des Ducs”- Marquis d’Angerville (served from magnum)

The drought year of 1976 has produced wines with plenty of depth and stuffing, but pretty stern tannic structures, and there seems to be plenty of examples from this vintage that will probably never resolve properly as a result. The '76 Ducster out of magnum is really lovely on the nose today, offering up a complex aromatic constellation of desiccated cherries, heather, woodsmoke, gamebird, coffee, *sous bois* and a distinct topnote of juniper berries. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tangy, with a good core, still a fair bit of hard, firm tannin and some almost fiery acidity sticking out on its own at the backend of the long and complex finish. I really wonder if this wine is ever going to soften before the fruit starts to fade, but for the present time, there remains plenty of stuffing here and hope remains. But, to my palate, it seems like these tannins have not moved at all in the decade since I last drank the wine out of a regular-sized format. Some of this is of course the magnum size here, but it also seems like the tannins are not on the same track as the rest of the wine and one day they will be left behind on their own. The score reflects the fact that there is a lot of pleasure to be had here, despite having to chew through the tannins a bit. 2013-2040? **90.**

1970 Clos Vougeot- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg

In contrast to the bottle of 1970 Grands Echézeaux from DRC reported on below, this bottle of 1970 Clos Vougeot from Georges Mugneret was still cruising along nicely and is a very stylish middleweight in its plateau of maturity. The bouquet is very pretty, offering up scents of desiccated cherries, a touch of orange peel, forest floor, walnuts, gamebird and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, transparent and shows fine intensity of flavor, with melted tannins, tangy acids and lovely focus and balance on the long, poised and complex finish. Really a very, very pleasant surprise! 2015-2030. **91.**

1970 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1970 Grands Echézeaux from DRC is a pretty good example of the vintage, but it does not transcend the quality of the year like so many other wines from the domaine seem to do when tasted in the cellars in Vosne. This bottle is getting to the end of its useful life, but still retains some interest, delivering a complex nose of beetroot, cherries, game, forest floor, citrus zest and a topnote of dusty, dried herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full and somewhat sweet-sour in its gentle decline, with modest depth and a rather four-square personality from chapitalization, but really pretty decent length still on the fully mature finish. This is okay, but getting long in the tooth. 2013-2025? **84.**

1966 Echézeaux- Domaine Louis Gouroux

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Domaine Louis Gouroux, but based on the fine showing of this 1966 Echézeaux, I keep an eye out for other older bottles from the producer. The bouquet is really quite superb, jumping from the glass in a mix of black fruit, *sous bois*, venison, bonfire, coffee, a touch of orange zest, herb tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and quite complex, with good remaining depth at the core, melted tannins, tangy acids and fine focus on the very long and stylish finish. This is a very good, *à point* example of Echézeaux! 2009-2030. **93.**

1966 Echézeaux- Domaine Lamadon

I had never heard of this domaine, but came across a few bottles of this wine at a good price way back in the day and just tucked them away in my cellar. Both bottles turned out to be very good and really great values in the context of what I paid for them all those years ago, with this last bottle showing lovely breed and complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a deep and *à point* blend of cassis, singed heather, roasted game, *sous bois*, espresso and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and impressively soil-driven in profile, with a good core, lovely focus and grip and a long, vibrant finish. Good juice from a relatively unknown source. 2015-2025+. **91.**

1966 Richebourg- Domaine Charles Noëllat

The 1966 Charles Noëllat Richebourg is an old-fashioned and malty bottle, offering up scents of black cherries, charred wood, chocolate, dark soil tones, nutskins and a bit of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and four-square, with a sturdy, extracted style, still a bit of backend tannin and not a whole lot of complexity or breed. Not particularly inspiring stuff. 2012-2030. **82.**

1966 Richebourg- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1966 Richebourg from DRC in more than a decade prior to sharing a glass of this fine wine at a Paulée, but this most recent bottle was hitting on all cylinders and really was a marvelous glass of wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and very vibrant, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of dried cherries, a touch of beetroot, heather, venison, coffee, woodsmoke and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very complex, with a great signature of soil, a lovely core of fruit, superb focus and grip, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the meltingly tannic and singing finish. Just a marvelous bottle (and in more pristine condition than the one I drank all the way back in 2002, the last time I was fortunate enough to have the wine). 2009-2040. **94.**

1964 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Domaine Jean Hudelot

I had a very, very good bottle of 1966 Musigny from Jean Hudelot many years ago and consequently, had pretty high expectations for this '64 Amoureuses. The wine turned out to be good, but a bit too generously chapitalized and not quite first division quality as a result. The bouquet offers up a complex and properly mature blend of desiccated cherries, *fraises du bois*, venison, fresh herb tones, *sous bois* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex, but just a touch four-square stylistically, with a good core, melted tannins, sound acids and good length and grip on the nicely tertiary finish. This would have been more delicate without the rather heavy-handed chapitalization, which might have made it less interesting to the domaine's clients way back when, but which would have allowed it to age even better than it has. Still, not a bad drink by any means, just not all it could have been. 2016-2035. **89.**

1962 Charmes-Chambertin- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1962 Charmes-Chambertin from Maison Jadot is a very good example of this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a notably transparent blend of dried cherries, orange zest, coffee, game, a lovely base of autumnal soil and a smoky topnote redolent of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a good sweet core, melting tannins and a long, tangy and very well-balanced finish. Good juice. 2012-2025+. **90.**

1962 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1962 Echézeaux from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is a very, very lovely old bottle, but like so many examples of this vintage of red Burgundy, it seems to have lost a bit of steam in the last decade and is now poised at the far side of its plateau and likely to start its gentle decline in the coming years. The bouquet today is the most satisfying aspect of this lovely elder statesman, delivering a complex blend of cherries, wild strawberries, beetroot, *sous bois*, orange peel and a very discreet topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is fullish, tangy and intensely flavored, with good, but not exceptional mid-palate depth, faded tannins, lovely complexity and a long, sweet and gentle finish. There is not a whole lot of backend grip here anymore, which suggests that it is probably best to plan on drinking this lovely old wine up in the near future- at least in regular-sized formats. 2014-2025+? **90.**



The incomparably lovely Mugneret sisters, Christine and Marie-Andrée of Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg.

1961 Echézeaux- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg

I somehow overlooked this note in past articles on older red Burgundies, as this dates back to the end of 2009. The wine is absolutely brilliant on both the nose and palate today, offering up great breed and complexity in its aromatic constellation of cherries, plums, a touch of dark berry, grilled venison, woodsmoke, *sous bois* and a topnote of new leather. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, fresh and flat out stunning, with a fine core, breathtaking

complexity, fine focus and grip and a very long, soil-driven and meltingly tannic finish. This has years and years of life still in it. 2009-2035. **95.**

1959 Musigny- Maison Joseph Drouhin

It had been more than a decade since I last drank a bottle of the 1959 Drouhin Musigny and the wine has aged far more gracefully than I have over the same period! This is a great, great vintage of this iconic wine and it remains at the peak of its powers and drinking with great complexity and style. The bouquet soars from the glass in a fully mature and still vibrant blend of baked red plums and cherries, heather, *pigeon*, complex soil tones, coffee, lovely spices and autumnal elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and velvety on the attack, with a plush core, impeccable focus and balance, zesty acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and utterly joyful finish. A wine of generosity and uncompromising beauty! 2016-2050. **96.**

1959 Clos Vougeot- Maison Joseph Faiveley

This parcel of Clos Vougeot, which the house of Faiveley now owns, was part of the Mugnier family's Château de Chambolle-Musigny's vineyard portfolio back in this era, with team at Faiveley farming the parcel and making the wines on a *mettayage* agreement at this time. The Clos de la Maréchale vineyard in Nuits St. Georges was under a similar arrangement at this time, and as part of the contractual settlement that brought this vineyard back to the Mugniers, their parcel in the Clos Vougeot was passed on to Maison Faiveley. The 1959 Clos Vougeot is a lovely wine, offering up a mature and nicely autumnal bouquet of desiccated red berries and cherries, *porcini*, heather, gamebird, *sous bois*, dried roses and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with a fine core, beautiful focus and balance, tangy acids and impressive purity and length on the refined finish. Fine juice. 2013-2030+. **92.**

1959 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Colette Gros

Domaine Collette Gros was the precursor to today's Domaine Gros Frères et Soeur. This was my favorite of the troika of '59 Grands Echézeaux bottlings that a friend generously served at a recent tasting here in New York. The bouquet is the prettiest part of this old wine, offering up scents of cherries, raspberries, *sous bois*, a touch of bonfire, mustard seed and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch four-square, with a good core, just a touch of backend tannin and good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. There was not a lot of complexity here for a wine of this age, but it was a good, solid drink- though it is kind of weird that the wine is still primary at this advanced age. 2017-2060. **88.**

1959 Grands Echézeaux- Domaine Louis Gros

Domaine Louis Gros was the precursor to the domaine that eventually became Jean Gros and now Michel Gros. This wine was a bit long in the tooth, but still retained a bit of interest, offering up a tertiary and autumnal blend of dried cherries, forest floor, fire pit, hung game and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still has some old, sweet fruit at the core and a nice touch of meatiness, but the wine is starting to crack up on the backend, with some old fashioned bitterness sticking out and the wine getting malty in its senility. This was probably a very good wine twenty years ago, but it has been in decline now for quite some time. 2017-2027. **84.**

1959 Grands Echézeaux- Maison Remoissenet

I have no idea when this wine came into the market, but it was quite similar to the wines I remember back in the day from the firm and which were discussed above. When first served, this

wine was the pick of the litter, as the aromatics were really quite attractive, offering up scents of raspberries, Vosne spices, balsam bough, soil and plenty of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and decidedly youthful in profile, with a plump core and a long, tannic finish. The backend here is a bit raw from its tannins, which is hardly a characteristic one would associate with the plushly ripe, velvety 1959 vintage- particularly fifty-eight years out from the vintage. As this wine sat in the glass it became more and more disjointed, seemingly as the different aged wines in the blend began to go their separate ways. Not a very convincing effort. 2017-2035+. **80.**

1959 Nuits St. Georges- Domaine Méo-Camuzet

The 1959 Nuits St. Georges from Domaine Méo-Camuzet is from the private family cellar stocks, as they were selling almost everything off to négociants in this era. This wine was tasted all the way back in 2009 at the twentieth anniversary celebration of the first full vintage bottled at the domaine, but somehow I overlooked the note in past iterations of this report. The wine is still quite lovely, though a touch marked by volatile acidity when first poured and needs to be swirled a bit to allow this to blow off. Once it blossoms, the wine offers up a fine nose of roasted plums, black cherries, *sous bois*, game, bonfires and a nice touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and velvety on the attack, with still a good core, melted tannins and very good length and grip on the fairly complex finish. For a fifty year-old village wine, this was very tasty and will still be drinking nicely today. 2009-2020+. **90.**

1959 Nuits St. Georges “Clos des Porrets”- Maison Joseph Faiveley

The 1959 Clos des Porrets from Maison Faiveley is an excellent wine that has been fully mature for decades, but is still in its plateau of peak maturity and drinking with style and vigor. The bouquet is deep, complex and tertiary, offering up scents of cherries, hung game, a touch of nutskin, woodsmoke, *sous bois* and still a touch of that medicinal Nuits character in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and really still has lovely mid-palate stuffing, with fine focus and grip, melted tannins and excellent balance on the very long and complex finish. This is high class Nuits in its prime! 2012-2035. **93.**

1957 Vosne-Romanée “la Colombière”- Domaine Mugneret-Gibourg

This is another older note that I somehow missed in my past reports on mature red Burgundies, as I tasted this back in November of 2009, but I am sure that the wine remains in good drinking shape today, if anyone is lucky enough to come across a bottle. The bouquet is really quite lovely, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of dried red plums, Vosne spice tones, a complex base of soil, coffee, fallen leaves and a hint of summer truffle. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and intensely flavored, with tangy acids, lovely focus and balance and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. A beautiful testament to just how well village wines can age from a top estate. 2009-2025. **89.**

1956 La Tâche- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

The 1956 La Tâche from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti was sampled the last time I was at the domaine to taste a young vintage, which was now some time ago, as they have not found room for me in the Inn for a few vintages now. The wine is really quite pretty for an off vintage, offering up a beautifully complex bouquet of cherries, blood orange, gentle autumnal tones, duck, roses and a beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and tangy, with seamless balance, modest depth at the core and a very long, intensely flavored and complex

finish. This is a middleweight vintage of La Tâche, but with the perfume and lovely soil tones of this *terroir* still very nicely displayed. 2012-2025+. **90.**

1955 Clos de Tart

This particular bottle of the '55 Clos de Tart was getting fairly long in the tooth, but still tasty. The bouquet is the best part of the wine today, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of dried dark berries, venison, woodsmoke, forest floor and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full and gently fading, with the fruit starting to slide and leaving the wine a touch eviscerated, but with the structure still pretty sound and the finish long, tangy and complex. This is to the point of fragility, but is still quite tasty if served immediately upon opening and enjoyed for its remaining delicate complexity, which clearly hints at greater past glories. 2015-2025? **87.**

1955 Vosne-Romanée “Premier Cru”- Domaine René Engel

The 1955 Vosne-Romanée “Premier Cru” from Domaine René Engel is really an excellent wine and at age sixty-one it continues to drink with style and perfumed complexity. The beautiful and classic nose wafts from the glass in a mix of raspberries, summer truffles, gamebird, dark soil tones, a hint of beetroot and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and vibrant, with lovely intensity of flavor, impressive complexity and a very long, tangy and silky finish. Just a beautiful bottle of old Vosne premier cru (was this a blend of Brûlées and another holding from the Engel family back in the day, or pure Brûlées?), with the balance and structural integrity to continue on still for some time in bottle. 2016-2030. **91.**

1955 Romanée- St.-Vivant- Maison Joseph Drouhin

This particular bottle of 1955 Romanée- St.-Vivant from Maison Joseph Drouhin was a bit fragile and needed drinking fairly briskly after it was opened, but there could well be more vigorous bottles still out there. The bouquet is very, very pretty on this wine, delivering a blend of desiccated raspberries and cherries, Vosne spice tones, *sous bois*, heather, coffee and gamebirds. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and fresh on the attack, with a sweet core and good length and grip on the finish, which is starting to show just a bit of backend bitterness suggesting that the structure is on the cusp. Bottles in the same condition as our bottle would need drinking up in the next few years, but this may have just been reflective of this particular example of the wine. Still quite enjoyable in its fragile state. 2012-2020. **88.**

1953 Chambertin “Clos de Bèze”- Maison Thorin (served from magnum)

While I generally do not take notes on bottles that show such as this wine, it is a perfect example of what I was referring to in the introduction about “second or third division” old Burgundies that are now starting to find a market as so much of the blue chip old wines are priced at stratospheric levels of have been drunk up by older generations. This wine is best on the nose, as it delivers a lovely, autumnal blend of desiccated cherries, *sous bois*, mustard seed, a good base of soil and pretty spice tones in the upper register. Maybe not up to Clos de Bèze expectations, but a good solid nose is to be found here. However, on the palate the wine is less interesting, as it is over-chapitalized and what now remains at the core is from the sugar, not the fruit. The wine is reasonably long on the backend, but the volatile acidity is now coming clear of the other structural elements and giving the wine some sourness on the finish. The palate complexity does not match the nose and the overall impression is of a rather modest example of this great *terroir*. I should mention that we also had a 1919 Richebourg from Thorin at this same

tasting, which I did not take a note on, as it was even less sound. This was probably a pretty indifferent example of Clos de Bèze from the outset, but it has at least survived in bottle. Drink up. 2016-2025? **84.**

1953 Richebourg- Maison Joseph Drouhin

I do not know what it is with old Richebourg and me, but I never seem to hit all that many truly great bottles in comparison to the number I have been lucky enough to taste. A few great old DRC examples stand out (such as the '66 reported on above), as well the 1969 from Jean Gros and the 1972 version from Joseph Drouhin (which had been made by Henri Mayer), but most examples have been in the good, but not great camp and I wonder if it is just my bad luck or is this *terroir* not quite all it is cracked up to be over the long haul? In any case, this 1953 Richebourg from Maison Drouhin was quite good on the nose, offering up scents of baked cherries and plums, heather, venison, cinnamon, charred wood and a fine base of gently autumnal soil tones. So far so good. On the palate the wine is not quite as interesting as the nose promised, with the wine deep, fullish and a touch volatile, with a ripe personality, good depth at the core, faded tannins and a long, velvety, but slightly simple finish. The wine is far more complex on the nose than on the palate, but maybe it is just in gentle decline now and back in its glory days, the palate was every bit a match for the very good bouquet. In any case, a good, but not great bottle of mature Richebourg and perfectly in character for my expectations from this vineyard at age fifty-plus. 2016-2030. **88.**



1949 Musigny- Caves Nicolas

While I have always been a fan of the Caves Nicolas' bottlings of old Bordeaux, my luck with their old Burgundy bottlings has never been as satisfying. This bottle of 1949 Musigny seemed to show a bit of spirit in the nose, with perhaps a touch of cognac having been added for color back in the day? Underneath were notes of cherries, orange zest, *sous bois*, iron and mustard seed. On the palate the wine is fullish, long and ample, with broad shoulders, modest complexity, but really pretty good length and grip on the still well-preserved finish. There was no signs of oxidation and the wine will still be drinking pretty well, but this is not top division Musigny. 2009-2020+. **87.**

1949 Volnay "Champans"- Marquis d'Angerville

I used to be in and out of this domaine twice a year when Jacques d'Angerville was still alive, but I have not received an affirmative response to any of my recent requests for a visit to taste in the cellars. It is too bad, as I was a great admirer of this estate back in the day, but have lost track with it in recent times. In any event, this does not prevent me from enjoying the brilliance of their mature wines these days, and this bottle of 1949 Champans was still holding on nicely, offering up an autumnal, meaty and still quite vibrant nose of cherries, roasted meats, *sous bois*, orange rind, woodsmoke and a touch of tea in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full and tertiary, with good intensity of flavor remaining, lovely complexity and very good length and grip on the seamless finish. With good reason, this is now old and delicate in style, but still retains pretty good vigor for its age. 2013-2025+. **91.**

1948 Clos des Lambrays

I have had some absolutely magical bottles of old Clos des Lambrays from this era and earlier, but this was the first time I had a chance to try the 1948. This was not a great vintage in Burgundy, but Clos des Lambrays seems to have been particularly successful in lesser vintages in this era and the wine was absolutely delicious and plenty robust in style. The vintage itself was cool and wet through mid-summer, but the backend was very good and an Indian Summer into October allowed for some good wines to reportedly be produced, but I am sure keeping rot and mildew at bay during the first half of the growing season was quite difficult. In any case, the '48 Clos des Lambrays is excellent, delivering a fine, fine nose of dried red berries, a touch of paraffin, heather, roasted venison, charred wood, coffee and damp forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and beautifully autumnal in personality, with a solid core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is less black fruity than higher-regarded vintages here in this era, but the quality is still quite exceptional and the wine still has plenty of life in it. 2016-2035. **92.**

1947 Echézeaux- Domaine de la Romanée-Conti

This particular bottle of 1947 DRC Echézeaux was a bit on the volatile side, so one's enjoyment of it depended on one's tolerance to volatile acidity. The bouquet shows all of the characteristics of this hot vintage in Burgundy, offering up a mix of baked red fruit, *sous bois*, roasted venison, cloves, a touch of cola, woodsmoke and a nice touch of savory elements redolent of celery seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and ripe in personality, with a fine core, melted tannins and a bit of backend sourness from the volatile acidity showing up on the long and complex finish. I imagine that there are bottles of the '47 Echézeaux from the domaine that are less volatile than this example, and to be fair with this bottle, the VA did substantially blow off with air. Pristine bottles should merit the score at the

top of the range, whereas this bottle went back and forth while it was open between the higher and lower scores of the range. 2013-2035+. **87-94.**

1947 Pommard “Rugiens”- Domaine Michel Gaunoux

I have drunk an awful lot of old wines from the Gaunoux family over the years and count myself very, very lucky indeed to have done so, but this was the first time I had ever tasted the 1947 Rugiens from the domaine. This wine would have been made by Michel’s father, Henri Gaunoux, as Michel did not succeed his father as head of this great Pommard estate until the 1957 vintage. The wine is breathtakingly beautiful, offering up grand cru depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The stunning bouquet is a glorious blend of cherries, orange peel, woodsmoke, *sous bois*, a touch of cinnamon stick, dried eucalyptus and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very transparent in profile, with sweet, solid core of fruit, still a bit of ’47 tannin on the backend and a very long, tangy and perfectly balanced finish. As the Gaunoux family did not buy their parcel in Rugiens *le bas* until 1940, this was one of the first vintages of this cuvée produced. This wine, at sixty-six years of age, is still at its zenith and is a simply magical bottle of great red Burgundy! 2013-2040+. **97.**

1947 Volnay “Clos des Chevrets”- Marquis d’Angerville

In the early 1950s, Jacques d’Angerville traded the Clos des Chevrets with Henri Boillot for the parcel of Pommard that the domaine now cultivates, so this wine is only seen from the d’Angerville family in very old vintages. The 1947 Clos des Chevrets was excellent, offering up a superb nose of cherries, red berries, spiced meats, forest floor and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with lovely focus and balance, a superb core of fruit for a wine of its age, still a bit of tannin and a very long, tangy and gently volatile finish. The stuffing here is exemplary, but the whisper of volatility on the backend suggests that perhaps this wine will be better drunk up in the relative short-term, despite its admirable remaining depth of fruit. A lovely old bottle of Volnay! 2013-2035+? **92.**

1945 Chambolle-Musigny “les Amoureuses”- Maison Joseph Faiveley

The 1945 Amoureuses from Maison Faiveley is a beautiful example of this great vintage. The bouquet is complex, tertiary and still plenty vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of dark berries, woodsmoke, singed soil tones, chicory, autumn leaves, espresso and a distinctive topnote of dried eucalyptus. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still at its apogee, with a lovely core of fruit, superb complexity and breed, melting tannins and a very long, focused and energetic finish. This is at its peak, but still has decades of life ahead of it. Great juice, as so many of the Faiveley wines from this era can be if well-stored! 2013-2040+. **95.**

1945 Musigny- Domaine de Comte de Vogüé (Mise en Bouteille Joseph Drouhin)

About fifteen years ago, a number of bottles of this wine surfaced, alongside the 1947 and 1949 versions, which the Drouhin family confirmed could well have been authentic, as they had bought some wine from the Domaine de Comte de Vogüé in these immediate post-war vintages. When they first found their way onto the market, a well-known collector asked me to taste a couple of bottles with him, as I had had the good fortune to drink domaine-bottled versions of their Musigny from these vintages as well on several occasions, and I felt that the wines were true to their vintages and vineyard and legitimate. After that, I had not seen a bottle again until a friend from Germany sent a bottle over to New York to help celebrate a mutual friend’s fiftieth birthday, which we did in high style over the course of several meals! The wine was showing even better today than was the case when they first arrived in the market, with this bottle showing a beautifully perfumed nose of dried cherries and strawberries,. Cinnamon,

cloves, *sous bois*, gamebird, a touch of sweet nuttiness and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and transparent, with great complexity, melted tannins, bright, well-integrated acids and laser-like focus on the very long and complex finish. This is a beautiful example of my favorite red wine *terroir* in all the world. 2014-2035. **96.**

1945 Beaune “Grèves” l’Enfant Jésus- Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1945 Beaune “Grèves” l’Enfant Jésus from Bouchard Père et Fils is a good solid wine, but it is a period piece and consequently a bit more chapitalized than would have been ideal for its long-term evolution. The bouquet offers up a good and ripe mix of black cherries, venison, fire pit, chocolate, forest floor and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, generously chapitalized and a bit four-square in profile, with a rather powerful personality for an old Beaune, tangy acids, and still a bit of rustic tannin perking up the long and slightly blunt finish. This is okay and seems to be all from 1945, but I have had better old vintages of this bottling. 2016-2040. **85.**

1945 Volnay “Caillerets” Tête de Cuvée- Domaine Malivernet

This is one of those old-fashioned, slightly adulterated red Burgundies that is not composed entirely of pinot noir from the Caillerets vineyard, but has actually aged okay and is not that bad of a drink today, if one is not a stickler for authenticity. The nose shows a bit of a “boosted” quality (probably from a bit of grenache?) in its aromatic profile, which is now a blend of dried black cherries, hung game, chocolate, bonfires, spiced meats and fallen leaves. On the palate the wine is fullish, chunky and shows some nice old wine complexity, with faded tannins and just a whisper of volatile acidity starting to poke out on the reasonably long finish. In its hybrid genre, it is not too bad. 2013-2025+. **86.**

1929 Musigny- Maison Henri de Bahèzre

Maison Henri de Bahèzre was a small négociant based in Nuits St. Georges back in this era, and I had never tasted a bottle from them until crossing paths with this 1929 Musigny. The wine is really quite good and still cruising along remarkably well for it being in its mid-eighties in age, offering up a beautiful nose of cherries, orange peel, iron soil tones, game, forest floor and a gentle topnote of nutmeg. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly generously chapitalized in style, but with good complexity, melted tannins, sound acids and good focus and grip on the surprisingly long and classy finish. A very, very pleasant surprise from a bottle that we were not expecting great things from, but which showed very well. 2015-2035. **90.**

1924 Beaune “Clos des Mouches”- Maison Joseph Drouhin

Maurice Drouhin purchased the family maison’s first parcel in the Clos des Mouches in 1919, soon after returning to Beaune from his duties as a soldier during the First World War, so this 1924 was one of the very earliest vintages ever produced of this wine. The wine is still quite vigorous at nearly ninety years of age, offering up a deep, old-fashioned nose of dark fruit, singed earth, game, *sous bois*, smoke, truffles and touch of candle wax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still structurally sound, with a good attack, a solid core and just a bit of oxidation showing on the long, velvety finish. This particular bottle was drunk in Beaune, but had been shipped there by a US collector a short time before the tasting, and my gut feeling is that the bit of oxidation this wine showed was a result of its recent voyage, rather than something inherent in the wine today. The bottle showed a solid **88** points on this evening, but I suspect it is even better than that if it had been given a chance to settle in from shipping. 2012-2030+. **88+?**



1923 Beaune- Cave Allerey

This is another old producer or négociant that I had never tasted anything from before, but this bottle popped up at that 2009 Paulée and was really quite good still- particularly in the context of a Beaune at nearly eighty-five years of age! The wine offers up a lovely old Burgundy nose of cherries, bonfires, coffee, a touch of caramel and forest floor. On the palate the wine is just a touch oxidative, but also full, deep and complex, with tertiary layers and a long, velvety finish. It is only the very slight touch of incipient oxidation that kept the score down a tad, but one can easily imagine bottles with better corks that would not have this issue and would merit several points higher score as a result. 2009-2025. **86.**

1917 Clos des Lambrays

1917 was another “off vintage” in Burgundy where the Clos des Lambrays did surprisingly well, and when I last drank this wine in 2009 at that Paulée, it showed very well indeed. The nose and palate show just a hint of oxidation to them, but this seems to just be part and parcel with the overall age of the wine and did not take anything away from the very considerable enjoyment of the bottle. The bouquet is classic old Clos des Lambrays, wafting from the glass in a mix of dried black fruit, candle wax, sweet leather, dark soil tones, Cuban cigars and *sous bois*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and amazingly rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, exemplary complexity and a very long, velvety, old school finish of very high quality. This is really good juice and shockingly superb for a 1917 red Burgundy! 2009-2030+. **92.**

DOMAINE FRANÇOIS COTAT'S LONG-LIVED AND BRILLIANT SANCERRE



The Cotat family of Chavignol have been the most famous producers in Sancerre for many, many years. François Cotat and his cousin, Pascal, currently carry on the legacy of the Cotat family in the village of Chavignol, after having split up the family legacy of vineyards, with François being the one who has retained the *cuvier* and cellars previously inhabited by his father and uncle, Paul and Francis Cotat. During their careers Paul and Francis Cotat became the most highly-regarded producers in all of Sancerre by producing long-lived and *terroir*-driven wines that transcended the popular notion regarding Sancerre as a light-hearted, early drinking and vivacious example of sauvignon blanc that was never meant for the cellar. The Cotat family has always produced wines in the great tradition of Chavignol of yesteryear, with the wines starting out life structured, reticent and rock solid and emphatically demanding bottle age to start to show their true colors. François Cotat has continued the family tradition quite faithfully, making the wines in the exact same fashion as his father and uncle did during their careers before him, with the wines barrel-fermented, aged in ancient *foudres* and casks prior to bottling and demanding plenty of time in the cellar to blossom. In contrast, cousin Pascal Cotat has changed things just a bit in his own cellars (located in the town of Sancerre) compared to his father's era, so that the wines from the half of the domaine that he inherited when the two cousins went their

separate ways are slightly different than those of the previous generation, albeit, still excellent in quality. I will be working on a feature on the wines of Pascal Cotat in the months to come, but for the moment, this article focuses on the utterly classical wines of his cousin, François Cotat.

François Cotat first began working alongside of his father and uncle back in 1979 and he and his cousin Pascal split up the family vineyards in 1998, upon the official retirement of the previous generation. François Cotat had already become the *de facto* winemaker of the family domaine prior to its being split up between him and his cousin, as his father and uncle essentially handed over the winemaking to him here in the 1995 vintage. Pascal and his father Francis took parcels in the Monts Damnés in Chavignol and Grande Côte in Amigny from the shared family vineyards, while François and his father Paul retained the small parcel of vines in the Culs de Beaujeu in Chavignol, as well as their portion of the parcels in the other two vineyards. François Cotat now farms four hectares in the villages of Chavignol and Amigny, with three and a half hectares planted to sauvignon blanc and half a hectare to pinot noir, from which he produces both a Sancerre Rosé and a tiny amount of Sancerre Rouge. The pinot noir vines are not planted on the steep slopes of the hillside that towers over the center of town and houses the Monts Damnés and Culs de Beaujeu vineyards, but rather on the flatter section of Chavignol to the east of the center of the village, on the chalky small stones that *vignerons* in the area call *les Caillottes*. This total of four hectares under vine for François Cotat also includes a bit of new vineyard land that he has purchased since he and cousin Pascal went their separate ways in 1998, as François has now added a fourth bottling of Sancerre to his lineup, called “Caillottes”, which is from younger vines planted again on this chalky, flatter vineyard land that lies between Chavignol and the town of Sancerre. The first vintage of the Caillottes bottling *chez* Cotat was in 2005, but I have never had the pleasure to taste an example of this cuvée.

François had already been the winemaker at the family domaine for many years, taking over the primary responsibilities for this from his father in 1987 (with the watchful eyes of his father and uncle always looking over his shoulder to assist if need be), and as noted above, François Cotat has continued to work out of the family’s previous cellars and winery in the center of the village of Chavignol. Towards the latter part of the Paul and Francis Cotat era, the family domaine began to commercialize wines under three different labels (perhaps anticipating the eventual separation of the family vineyards into two domaines), with the wines sometimes labeled as Paul Cotat, Francis Cotat or François Cotat, but all having been made together in the family cellars by François in this era. It was the French tax authorities questioning the variations on labels hailing from a single cellar location that eventually led to the official change in generation and the divvying up of the Cotat family’s vineyards between François and Pascal in the latter half of the 1990s. The original family cellars are promoted in the classic, old school French style, reflecting the long-time popularity and reputation of the Cotat family’s wines, as there is no placard announcing the domaine’s presence at the end of the short alleyway just past the church in Chavignol where they are located and one simply has to know where they are headed for visits to the domaine. I have not been to the domaine since the summer of 2007, but on the day that I visited, the flowers were brightly in bloom around the doorway, Madame Cotat was sweeping the entryway in the bright morning sun, but there was a flattened cardboard case box with “*Fermé*” hand-painted on it lying against the door to the *cuvierie*, trying to discourage visitors without an appointment. That said, the welcome from François Cotat and his gracious mother that summer morning was warm and convivial. In fact, Monsieur Cotat was very

generous with his time during our tasting in Chavignol, as we spent several hours tasting through the newest vintages and several older bottles as well. I cannot believe that nearly a decade has rolled by since I was last tasting here *sur place*, and I hope to remedy this in the near future.

Despite the towering reputation of the Cotat domaine in the pantheon of Sancerre, this is not an ancient domaine by any stretch of the imagination, as Paul and Francis Cotat were only the second generation of their family to bottle their own wines in Chavignol, starting their careers just after the end of World War II. Their first vintage working with their uncle was 1947. The two boys had been adopted by their uncle, Ferdinand Cotat, who was a *vigneron* in Chavignol, after their father had passed away at a young age (presumably during the war), and it was through their uncle that Paul and Francis became *vignerons* in their own rights and eventually came to become the most famous producers in all of Sancerre. Their father had made wine as well prior to his untimely passing, but his generation has been the first in the Cotat family to sell wine directly to clients, as previous generations had farmed in the area, but principally sold off their production in bulk. The small parcel of Culs de Beaujeu that the family owns was bought *en friche* by Tonton Ferdinand Cotat and planted by him in the early years after the end of the Second World War. During the era when Paul and Francis ran their domaine (up through 1997), it was Paul Cotat and his family who lived at the small house attached to the cellars in the center of Chavignol (where François Cotat continues to make his wines), while Francis Cotat and his wife lived in the town of Sancerre. It was during the 1960s and 1970s that the wines from Paul and Francis Cotat began to really garner a stellar local reputation for their high quality. The two Cotat brothers continued to make their wines in the traditional manner of Chavignol, with low yields, barrel fermentation and extended *elevage* prior to bottling, completely ignored the modern trends in Sancerre that emerged in the '60s and '70s to increase yields in the vineyards, ferment in stainless steel and bottle fairly early in the spring after the harvest, so that the new vintage could be rushed to the thirsty Parisians who fancied Sancerre as their white wine of choice in the bistros and brasseries of the City of Light.

Like Edmond Vatan at this time, Paul and Francis Cotat eschewed the more commercial style of Sancerre that grew up in those years, preferring to make wines in the ancient method that had made the white wines of Chavignol so famous for hundreds of years prior to Paris adopting Sancerre as its white wine *quaff* of choice, which meant restraining yields dramatically from what was becoming the modern norm, picking late for proper ripeness, only growing grapes in the great, hillside vineyards of Chavignol and Amigny and fermenting and aging the wines in large old barrels to produce a true *vins de gardes* style that demanded proper cellaring prior to drinking the wines. The Cotat brothers built up a loyal clientele over the course of their careers, with top restaurants clamoring for their wines for their wine lists and private clients very happy to be given an allocation each year. In addition to the three white wines that Paul and Francis Cotat jointly produced during their era (Monts Damnés, Culs de Beaujeu and La Grande Côte), they also produced a Sancerre Rosé and a very small amount of Sancerre rouge as well, which was primarily retained for family consumption and a few lucky private clients. François Cotat has continued this family tradition, which includes making anywhere from three hundred to nine hundred bottles of his rare Sancerre *rouge*, depending on the size of the pinot noir crop each year (most of the pinot noir here is still retained to produce the domaine's amazingly fine Sancerre Rosé bottling), with the red wine not undergoing malolactic fermentation and one of the longest-lived *vins rouges* of Sancerre, as well as one of the most unique. It is such a rare wine that I have

only tasted it once in my long career in wine, having happily drunk a bottle of the 1983 *rouge* at the Restaurant La Tour in Sancerre way back in the late 1980s. It is a very unique example of pinot noir and needs a couple of hours in decanter prior to serving (we decanted ours prior to ordering a white wine or our menu on that memorable evening in Sancerre, with the winter wind howling outside the windows and a wood fire crackling on the hearth- it was the perfect red wine choice).



François Crochet (right) and my good friend, Sasha Katsman, waiting for the Chavignol Rosé to chill.

When it came time to split up the family vineyards in 1998, due to the pressures from the French tax authorities, Francis Cotat set up a small cellar at his home in Sancerre to vinify that first harvest, as his son Pascal, who has his own business doing auto body work (primarily focused on restoring classic old cars) was not yet ready to take on the winemaking duties for his and his father's share of the family vineyards. For that reason, Pascal did not make and bottle his first wines until the 1999 vintage, receiving plenty of assistance for the first few years from his father. Today, Pascal Cotat has a small *cuvée* and cellars established at the location of his auto body shop in the town of Sancerre. In the meantime, François Cotat has continued to make his side of the family wines at the original domaine in the center of Chavignol, with only his recent decision to start picking a bit earlier in the last couple of vintages being the sole change he has executed from the winegrowing philosophies that he learned from his father and uncle in their day. These precepts will sound familiar to those who recall the article on Edmond Vatan-

continuing to crop at low yields, hand-harvesting all the fruit, fermenting in old casks with indigenous yeasts, racking by the lunar cycle and bottling without fining or filtration. When Francis Cotat is asked about his viticultural practices, he will say that he likes to practice an enlightened form of organic farming, as he is not certified and will certainly use the means necessary to save a crop in a very difficult growing season, but in principle only organic methods are used in the vineyards. His father and uncle were renowned for harvesting later than anyone in Chavignol, with the exception of their good friend Edmond Vatan, and François followed this practice for the first fifteen years of his time as the sole proprietor of the domaine. However, as Gérard Boulay reported in the last issue of the newsletter, in the last few years, Francis Cotat has begun to pick a week or two earlier than before, in an attempt to counterbalance some of the effects of climate change.

Once the grapes are pressed in the ancient, old wooden mechanical press (which Paul and Francis Cotat used back in the day and which François continues to use for his own wines), the wines are fermented in very old *demi-muids*, which must be at least fifty years of age (and perhaps older) judging from their appearance when I was last at the domaine. Like the fermentation vessels used by Edmond Vatan, these old *demi-muids chez* Cotat are completely encrusted with tartrate crystals on the interior. All of the cuvées are handled identically in the cellars. After their alcoholic fermentations, the wines are racked in January into older, 225 liter barrels for their *elevage*, which will generally last until the new moon in May, when they are racked a final time into *foudres* for final settling prior to bottling. As is the case with Edmond Vatan as well, the lunar calendar decides when a wine will be racked by Monsieur Cotat, as he finds that the young wines in cask are very much in harmony with the cycles of the moon. After three to four weeks of settling after this racking, the wines are hand bottled without fining or filtration. During the fermentation, Francis Cotat will utilize chapitalization if he feels it is necessary in a given vintage (no vintage has needed chapitalization here since 2004, thanks to global warming) and on occasion, this has run afoul of the INAO officials in the region. Ostensibly, this is because no wine in Sancerre can be chapitalized and retain any residual sugar in the wines, which is often the case with the wines from Monsieur Cotat (particularly up to a couple of years ago, when he was still harvesting at the later dates championed by his father and uncle in their day), and François Cotat was denied the use of the Sancerre appellation in both the 1998 and 2002 vintages! Not that it really mattered to him or his clients, as both vintages produced excellent wines and he had no difficulties selling every bottle he produced in brisk fashion, despite the fact that he was not allowed to call the wines “Sancerre”. But, this is always the case here, as the domaine has legions of fans whose demand far outstrips the production from these four hectares of vineyard land.

The amount of residual sugar in the wines here in recent times, as well as the alcohol levels in certain vintages has been higher than in the past, and clearly François Cotat has taken some thought about these elements in his wines in our present age of global warming. The move to start picking at least a week earlier in the last couple of years is a quite welcome change, as the most recent vintages that I tasted for this report did seem a bit ripe and also a bit sweet to my palate, and this has not always been the case with the young wines from Monsieur Cotat. This perception, of course, varies from vineyard to vineyard, as the cooler microclimate of the Culs de Beaujeu (with its northwesterly exposition) does not show this effect from climate change as dramatically as do the more “solar” vineyards of the Monts Damnés in Chavignol and La Grande

Côte in Amigny (both of these vineyards face due south), which has been particularly riper in recent times than was the case a couple of decades ago- with the exception of extraordinarily ripe past growing seasons such as 1989. Of the two due south-facing vineyards, Monts Damnés and La Grande Côte, it is the latter which seems to be the wine that shows the higher alcohol in recent times. I would attribute the higher sugar accumulations in La Grande Côte to the ease of ripening here, as Monsieur Cotat has had to replant a portion of this vineyard in the last fifteen years or so, with the sixty year-old vines that used to be planted across the board in La Grande Côte now augmented by some younger vines as well. Today, the average age of vines in La Grande Côte is around twenty years of age, so one can see that a sizable portion of the parcel has been replanted. In contrast, the average overall vine age in his parcels of Monts Damnés is thirty years of age, and perhaps the contribution of some younger vines in La Grande Côte have played a role in the higher alcohol levels here in the warmer growing seasons of contemporary times.

However, when one speaks the roles of residual sugar and higher alcohol levels in the wines from François Cotat, one does have to keep in mind that these two characteristics will often seem quite striking in certain vintages- when the wines are young- but, that these elements seem to fade to the background as the years roll by and the wines transform with bottle age. I look back at my notes on the domaine's wines from vintages like 2004 when they were first released and I see myself commenting about the residual sugar in the young wines, but in our pair of recent vertical tastings that formed the foundation for this report, this was imperceptible to my palate in this vintage, as other elements in the wine have come to the fore with bottle age. Based on how beautifully wines like the 2004s and 2005s from François Cotat were showing at our spring tastings, it is likely that younger ripe vintages like the 2012s will also come nicely into a harmonious balance a decade or more down the road. For despite the two elements of occasional residual sugar and higher octane being parts of the equation in several recent vintages from the domaine, they are hardly the dominant themes in a mature example, as it is the extraordinary minerality and raciness of these wines which are their defining elements when fully mature. Given plenty of experience now, I generally try not to open any bottle from François Cotat until the wine has had at least a decade's worth of bottle age out from the vintage. In very top years, this is really only the beginning of its approachability, and in great vintages like 2005, the wines are not going to reach their ultimate apogees until at least twenty years has passed. This is also the same for the wines from Edmond Vatan. And once a wine from François Cotat has reached its plateau of maturity, it will remain here for decades and decades, and fifty or more years of potential longevity is the rule here, rather than the exception.

As I mentioned above, François Cotat has just started to pick a bit earlier than had been the family tradition dating back to the days when his father and uncle ran the family domaine, as the very real changes in our global weather patterns in the last couple of decades were producing more vintages in Chavignol with unprecedented levels of sugar in the grapes. He has only done so in the last few vintages in response to the realization that global warming is here to stay and picking at the traditional dates was producing wines that were higher in alcohol than he would like, as well as still often endowed with some residual sugar. As I alluded to in the introduction, such vintages were rare occurrences in the past, with an occasional vintage such as 1989 only coming along every twenty or twenty-five years, but in the twenty-first century, vintages like 2002, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2012 have all seen soaring sugar levels from the Cotat family parcels. In the past, François Cotat, or his father and uncle before him, would make a separate

bottling of the ripest grapes, which would be called “Cuvée Spéciale”. In the old days, the Cuvée Spéciale would normally hail from the last-picked or botrytized grapes in La Grande Côte in extraordinary years, but as sugars began to mount everywhere in our era of climate change, it was not practical to make more Cuvée Spéciale and less of the other bottlings and starting to pick a bit earlier was the logical response. But, one should not understate how difficult this decision must have been for François Cotat to take, as tradition here is the river on which the Cotat boat has floated for three generations, and given the long, long line of utterly remarkable wines fashioned here by the family as the decades have rolled by, changing traditional practices can only have been resorted to when all other possibilities were examined and rejected.



Looking down on the village of Chavignol from the top of the Monts Damnés.

To underscore the serious impact of climate change in the last several years on the wines from François Cotat and his neighbors, one need only to look at the frequency of the late-harvest bottlings produced at the domaine in the last decade or so. The Cuvée Spéciale was produced by the domaine in 1989 and then again in 1995 and 1996 (a botrytis year), prior to François and Pascal Cotat splitting up the family vineyards between them in 1998. Starting in 1999, François changed the name of this bottling at his domaine to Cuvée Paul to pay homage to his father. He has produced his Cuvée Paul bottling in 1999, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2010 since the name change, which clearly reflects the rather profound effect that global warming has had here in Chavignol, as it has in all of the wine-producing regions of Europe in the last couple of decades.

I would be very surprised if the growing frequency of these later-harvested, sweeter bottlings of Sancerre were a result of market demand and Monsieur Cotat just deciding to produce more of these styled wines for clients; to my mind it is very clearly a reflection of global warming. It is logical to recognize the increase in the number of these special cuvées as an attempt to deal with the much warmer growing conditions found in Sancerre in recent times and channeling the ripest grapes here into a separate bottling, so as to try and maintain the size, shape and classic Cotat profile of the traditional bottlings at the estate. With luck, starting to harvest just a bit earlier than in his father's and uncle's era will allow François Cotat to hold at bay at least some of the effects of climate change in his wines in the present day and we will see more grapes going into their traditional single vineyard bottlings in the coming vintages.

When one looks at just the first decade of the twenty-first century at Domaine François Cotat, with very warm vintages represented in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2009 and 2010, it is very clear that global warming has changed the equation here quite a bit from the days of Paul and Francis Cotat. While I like all of these vintages from François to varying degrees (with the exception of the 2003s) and feel that it would be foolhardy to bet against their eventually evolving into really good wines, one does have to wonder what the impact will be on the potential longevity of the wines from these very hot growing seasons. Traditionally, fifty to seventy-five years (or more?) of life in the bottle seems to have been the norm in the past *chez* Cotat, but will this still be the case with wines that are riper, such as the vintages listed above? While labeling is never quite precise when it comes to stated octane of a given wine, as the French government gives a half a degree swing in either direction from the stated level on the label (so that a wine listed at thirteen percent could legally range from 12.5 to 13.5 percent), I did notice over the course of my tastings for this article that at the tail end of the twentieth century, the vintages here generally were listed at 12.5 or thirteen percent, but we have the 2009s listed at 14.5 percent (and even fifteen percent for the *Monts Damnés!*), and the 2006s and 2010s all listed at 13.5 percent (and probably actually coming in a touch higher than that), so one has to wonder how this aspect will affect their potential longevity. Having a bit of residual sugar in the wines in the riper vintages has often been part of the Cotat house style, and I am less concerned with how these recent vintages with a bit of sweetness will evolve over their cellaring, given that sweeter wines in the past evolved beautifully, but instinctively, I have to bet that the higher alcohol levels may take a few decades of potential longevity away from some of these wines. Only time will tell.

The discussion of the challenge of trying to cope with the serious impact of climate change in Chavignol, should not detract from the fact that François Cotat, like his father and uncle before him, has an amazingly impressive track record for producing great wines in each and every vintage- no matter what Mother Nature has in store each year. When I first began drinking the wines from the family in the early 1980s, we used to focus especially on the riper vintages in the region as the "best", so that years such as 1985, 1989 and 1990 were singled out as the finest produced at the domaine. However, as my experience with these wines has grown over the years, I now realize that this was probably not a very useful or accurate approach to the wines from the Cotat family. In recent times, I have had the good fortune to try bottles of Domaine Cotat wines from vintages that were less ripe than the so-called "great years" from this era, and some of the most hauntingly beautiful bottles of wine I have tasted from the Cotat family and Edmond Vatan from this era have been years that started out their lives tightly-knit, a

bit “green” from less overt ripeness and quite reserved in profile, such as 1988 and 1993, but which blossomed with sufficient bottle age to be amongst the most beautiful bottles of mature Chavignol that I have had the pleasure to drink. Their expressions of their underlying *terroir* are different than in the riper years like 1989 or 1990, but no less magical and simply represent a different facet of the beauty of the marriage of the sauvignon blanc grape and these complex soils. I would expect a year like 1998 here to perform similarly and be absolutely stunning when fully mature.

In the last issue, I wrote about the superb wines of Gérard Boulay in Chavignol, and how his wines evolved over extended time in the bottle, transforming from very high quality, but rather classic expressions of Sancerre in their relative youth into wines that were more fully defined by their underlying Chavignol *terroir* once they had seen twelve or fifteen years in the bottle. This evolutionary pattern for Monsieur Boulay’s wines, moving from rather “typical” Sancerre tones of green apple, gooseberry, lime, cut grass and chalky soil tones into the more profound signature elements of the great hillside vineyards of Chavignol (smokiness, citrus peel, beeswax, botanicals and far more pronounced limestone minerality), is not generally emulated with the wines from François Cotat, which will often start out life with more of these latter elements in evidence from the very beginning. This is especially true of the Culs de Beaujeu and La Grande Côte bottlings from François, with perhaps his Monts Damnés bottling a bit more cut along the lines of the wines from Monsieur Boulay in their collective youth. The family tradition of cropping at very low yields and raising the wines in the cellar in old casks and *foudres*, not to mention bottling without filtration, gives the wines of François Cotat a very different textural feel on the palate right from the outset, as well as more Chavignol character right from the moment of their release. They also tend to be far more closed out of the blocks than any other wines produced in Sancerre today, with the possible exception of the wines from Edmond and Anne Vatan.

François Cotat’s wines are unequivocally made for long-term aging, and as I mentioned above, one really should try to not open any bottles in the cellar until the wines are at least ten years of age, as this is where they first start to stir and blossom a bit from behind their excellent structures of youth. Early on, the wines here can be rather inexpressive on the nose, as they show only a small percentage of their future aromatic complexity out of the blocks, and though the bouquet of a young François Cotat wine is far from unappealing, it only hints at the depths that will emerge with sufficient bottle age. On the palate, this is true as well, with the wines starting out life tight, rock solid at the core, snappy with outstanding acids and having an almost “oily” texture behind the serious girdle of acidity with which each and every François Cotat wines begins its journey in bottle. On the one occasion that I have tasted here *sur place* back in 2006, I found that the wines were (not surprisingly) far more expressive out of cask than they are in their early years after bottling, with more of the wine’s true character in evidence when they are still resting comfortably in the cellars. Bottling here is very gentle, with the wines bottled by hand and even corked by hand, so it is not a traumatic bottling process that causes them to close down so profoundly, but rather just the transition from their more spacious surroundings in cask to the confines of individual bottles. As I alluded to above, François Cotat racks and bottles his wines according the phases of the moon to allow the wines to be disrupted as little as possible by these two processes, in the tried and true traditional method of the region that is also still followed by Edmond and Anne Vatan at their own small domaine around the corner.

Once the wines from François Cotat really reach their apogees and blossom, they are the paradigm of Chavignol *terroir*, with fruit tones of lime, pear and citrus augmented by smoky scents, beeswax, kaleidoscopic minerality, petrol, anise and lovely botanicals. To my palate, the arrival of the beeswax note in the wines from the domaine is really the harbinger that they have arrived at their plateaus of maturity and are really and truly ready to drink. Once they are open and starting to hit on all cylinders, the wines from Domaine François Cotat have a very, very long life ahead of them and fifty years out from this moment of blossoming seems like the minimum potential of their longevity. I have never had the luck to drink really old bottles from the Cotat family, but there are reports in the region of wines going back to the earliest vintages after the second world war that are still cruising along beautifully and showing no signs of decline, so there is emphatically no rush to drink these beautiful wines once they hit their plateaus. The notes below are divided up by bottling, with the three single vineyard Sancerre Blanc bottlings listed first, followed by François Cotat's incomparable and also very, very ageworthy Sancerre Rosé. I do not have any notes on the newest of his wines, the Les Caillottes, produced from his new vineyards on the flatter vineyards east of the hillside that houses the Monts Damnés and Culs de Beaujeu, and as I mentioned above, I do not have any recent notes on the very rare Sancerre *rouge* from the domaine.

I should take a moment here to discuss this unique Sancerre Rouge bottling *chez* Cotat, as the domaine was very kind to answer my questions about the wine. As only a small percentage of the pinot noir production is dedicated to red wine here, which is not too surprising, given how utterly magical the Sancerre Rosé is from François Cotat, the production levels vary depending upon the size of the pinot noir crop. Given that the Rosé is made in the same, old, crystal-encrusted *demi-muid* each year, Monsieur Cotat has to ensure that he has enough pinot noir to fill the vessel each harvest for fermentation and aging, and whatever is surplus above this quantity is what is earmarked for the *vin rouge*. If the production numbers are closer to the three hundred bottle level (a single cask), the family keeps it all for their own consumption over the years, but if it ranges up to the two or three barrel level, then some is made available to the domaine's long-time clients. As the red wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation in barrel (which would cause a problem in the cellars, as the *vins blancs* do not undergo malo and the existence of malolactic bacteria here would not be a good thing) and is bottled without fining or filtration, there have been vintages where the wine underwent malo in bottle! As I have only had that lone bottle of the 1983 *vin rouge* from the domaine all those years ago, I do not have any experience with the reds that have undergone their malo in bottle, but I am told that if given a decade's worth of bottle age and then decanted for several hours prior to serving, they are also very, very good. The domaine offers the red wine to its best customers in small quantities in the vintages where there is enough to share on the understanding that they could undergo malo in bottle, and that this is a shared risk and no bottles are to be returned down the road. No one seems to mind the arrangement. It is a red wine as unique as that of Edmond Vatan and very much worth trying if one is lucky enough to stumble across a rare bottle.

Putting this article together has been a great pleasure, as is served as great reminder of my old friend Joe Dougherty, who was one of the most passionate collectors of the wines of both Cotat cousins that I have ever met. In fact, the last time we got together, he was characteristically offering a glass out of a magnum of the 1989 Monts Damnés from the Cotats, while manning the

grill! Joe was a very modest guy, and I have little doubt that his personality resonated with the Cotat family during his visits to the domaine during the course of his life. For the Cotats are very much like so many of the French *vignerons* that I got to know in my early days visiting the top domaines of France and tasting *sur place*. They are a humble and private family, shy to all of the attention that has been washing up to their steps for many decades now, but with a great generosity underneath which is very much evident once one has gotten to know them a little bit. Having only visited with François Cotat and his lovely mother on a single occasion in his cellars back in 2006, I can only claim to have seen a page or two out of the family book, but their style is something I very much recognize and respect from other families of a similar temperament that I have gotten to know a bit over the years. This was the traditional way of life in the wine regions of France in the past (with the exceptions of the more commercially-oriented regions of Bordeaux and Champagne back in the old days), where one took the time to slowly get to know the *vignerons* over the course of cellar visits though the years. For their part, the best producers made wines the way their fathers and grandfathers had done before them, feeling the sense of trusteeship of the great *terroirs* in which their vines were planted, and maximizing these to the best of their abilities, because “it was the right thing to do.” In a nutshell, this is what François Cotat has continued to do since he took over his share of the family vineyards in 1998, and what his father Paul and uncle Francis did for nearly fifty years before him. No doubt, Tonton Ferdinand Cotat did the same thing himself back in his own time. It is a way of life that one sees less and less in the modern age, but it continues to resonate its value profoundly, despite the fact that it is currently so out of fashion. We are very fortunate to still be able to taste a bit of these honest and time-tested values with which the Cotat family lives, every time we open a bottle of their magical wine. Maybe with time, more of us will find our way back to the garden.

François Cotat Sancerre “Monts Damnés”

The Monts Damnés bottling from François Cotat is his most forward cuvée of the three that he produces from the family’s original vines in the steep hillside vineyards in Chavignol and Amigny. The vines here average thirty years of age, which puts them in their prime right now and the wine is consistently excellent, year in and year out. François Cotat has just over a hectare of vines here in the Monts Damnés these days, after splitting up the family vineyard patrimony in this vineyard with his cousin Pascal in 1998. With its due south exposition, this wine is always a bit more expressive out of the blocks than either the Culs de Beaujeu or the Grande Côte, so when Cotat temptation strikes when I am down in my cellar, I try to at least limit my visits of infanticide to this bottling from the domaine, as it shows the best in its early years after bottling. The Monts Damnés is the heart of the outcropping of Kimmeridgian Limestone that defines the wines of Chavignol (and neighboring Grande Côte in Amigny), which the *Sancerrois* call *Terres Blanches* and which is the very finest *terroir* to be found in all of Sancerre. As I have written about often in the past, this is the very same strata of limestone that surfaces again in Chablis to form the slope that houses the grand crus and Montée de Tonnerre in that region. While the Monts Damnés is the most forward of the three single vineyard bottlings from François Cotat, it is every bit as ageworthy as either of the other two and I have to imagine that sixty or seventy years of longevity is part of the equation with the Monts Damnés bottling, but I am yet to drink any older than examples from the 1980s.



2012 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

François Cotat’s 2012 Monts Damnés is a lovely wine that is approachable out of the blocks, but will also have no difficulty aging long and gracefully. The ripeness of the vintage is very nicely managed here, as the bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of gooseberry, a touch of tangerine, complex minerality, fresh-cut grass and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, zesty and nascently complex, with a fine core, good soil signature and lovely focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. A lovely example of Cotat Monts Damnés. 2017-2040. **92+**.

2011 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

I was a bit surprised by the style of the 2011 Monts Damnés from François Cotat, as the wine was also showing a bit of residual sugar on the attack, which was far less expected in this less ripe vintage. However, this is no doubt the result of the late picking practices of the Cotat family in this era, and in more recent years this has been changed to accommodate climate change. In any case, the 2011 Monts Damnés is a lovely bottle in the making, wafting from the glass in a mix of petrol, gooseberry, tart orange, damp grass and a fine base of wet stone minerality. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with just a touch of residual sweetness on the attack, bright, snappy acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, youthful and energetic finish. This is already very tasty to drink in its youth, but will be even better with at least a few years’ worth of bottle age. 2017-2040+. **92**.

2010 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

The 2010 Monts Damnés, like all of the wines from Monsieur Cotat in this vintage, is in a funky adolescent stage and not particularly forthcoming at the present time. That it hails from one of the riper recent vintages is readily apparent, but the wine is not quite as high in alcohol as the 2009 version (14.5 versus fifteen percent) and should be really good in the fullness of time. The bouquet shows a ripe blend of tangerine, fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones, petrol and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a rock solid core of ripe fruit, bright acids and a very long, hunkered down finish that demands more bottle age today. While this is a global warming vintage and its future is uncertain for that reason, I expect this wine to really blossom nicely in the fullness of time and may well drink like the 1989s with sufficient bottle age. 2022-2055+. **92+**.

2009 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

Out of the blocks, the 2009s from François Cotat really showed the torrid side of this vintage and were palpably hot on the palate and quite tropical in their fruit expression. Now, eight years out from the vintage, they remain quite alcoholic in one regard, but my goodness, how the bouquet has now come around on the Monts Damnés and is really showing distinction. The nose is a mix of orange, pineapple, damp grass, chalky soil tones, lime peel and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerful in profile, with plenty of depth at the core, sound acids and fine focus and grip on the still slightly warm finish. This is fully fifteen percent alcohol in this vintage and will always be a bit warm, but I am really impressed how the wine is coming together in its other aspects and is actually starting to drink with distinction. 2020-2050. **91**.

2008 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

2008 was a vintage that I bought for my own cellar, but the wines were so tight out of the blocks that I just tucked them away for future drinking and had not been back to a bottle of any of the three cuvées from François Cotat since release. Therefore, I was very happy to see how beautifully the Monts Damnés is evolving, as the wine delivers a deep, complex and nicely cool aromatic profile of lime, gooseberry, damp grass, petrol, fine minerality and orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and very long, with a fine core, lovely youthful grassiness in ascendency today and impressive cut and grip on the very well-balanced finish. 2017-2040. **92**.

2007 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

The generally unheralded 2007s from François Cotat are evolving into the finest vintage of the decade here, with the possible exception of the cooler and still much more tightly-knit 2008s. For current drinking, it is hard to deny the beauty of this vintage *chez* Cotat, as the Monts Damnés offers up a superb and very complex bouquet of tangerine, pear, fresh-mown grass, beeswax, lovely minerality and a topnote of limepeel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a wide open personality, plenty of zest acidity, excellent focus and grip and a very long, perfectly balanced finish. An absolutely classic vintage of Monts Damnés! 2017-2045+. **93+**.

2005 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

François Cotat’s 2005 version of Monts Damnés is just starting to segue nicely into its secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is still bright and youthfully vivacious, but now has some signs of maturity in its mélange of candied limepeel, beeswax, superb minerality, botanicals and a nice touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and crystalline in personality, with a rock solid core, fine focus and

grip and a very long, racy and blossoming finish. This is probably pretty high in octane (fourteen percent seems likely), but has a taut girdle of acidity to carry the wine seamlessly on the palate. A great bottle of Monts Damnés that could still do with a few more years in the cellar before primetime drinking. 2020-2050. **94.**

2004 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

I had not seen a bottle of the 2004 Monts Damnés since the summer of 2006 and was very curious to see how this classically-inclined vintage was evolving with bottle age. Not surprisingly, it is outstanding! The wine is now into its apogee of peak drinkability and even better than I anticipated it would be in its youth, soaring from the glass in a complex blend of lime, tangerine, citrus blossoms, crystalline minerality and a nice topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully defined by its underlying minerality, with a lovely core, great structural tension and impressive focus and grip on the very long, complex finish. With extended breathing, this wine develops a complexity to its upper register botanicals that recalls a great vintage of mature Maximin Grünhäuser. 2017-2035. **94.**

2002 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

The 2002 Monts Damnés from the domaine is now into its plateau of maturity and is drinking with distinction. I have listed the wine as “Sancerre”, though readers will remember that this vintage *chez* Cotat was denied the AOC because of it having been chapitalized and still retaining residual sugar and the labels are marked as “Vin de Table”. In any event, this is again a riper vintage, but the alcohols on the label are only 13.5 percent and the wine has only a whisper of backend heat on the palate today. The bouquet is lovely, offering up a ripe and complex mélange of lime, pear, damp grass, botanicals, candied citrus peel and a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with lovely focus and grip, plenty of mid-palate intensity and a very long, classy and gently warm finish. This is very tasty today, with no real signs of any of its early residual sweetness still showing at age fifteen. 2017-2035. **91.**

2000 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

The 2000 Sancerre “Monts Damnés” from François Cotat is utterly classic in style, reflecting a cooler growing season and this wine remains relatively tight when first poured and needs a bit of time to blossom in the glass. Once it does so, this is a superb wine, offering up a pure and complex nose of lemon, beeswax, limepeel, chalky soil tones, damp grass and petrol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still shows a touch of white pepper on the backend (from its fitful ripening season), with a rock solid core, crisp acids, excellent grip and laser-like focus on the long, complex and energetic finish. This is going to continue to improve and I might be inclined to give it just a few more years in the cellar to really allow it to peak. It will be very long-lived. 2020-2060. **93.**

1999 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

Our bottle of 1999 Monts Damnés at this tasting was curiously still rather blocked aromatically by SO₂, which never completely relaxed. Underneath the sulfur is a wine of complexity, delivering scents of gooseberry, lime, chalky minerality, cress and gentle floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is far more expressive on the palate than on the curiously closed nose, but I assume that this was just our particular bottle. I would love to see this wine again, as the 1999 Grande Côte served alongside of it had no issues with SO₂ and was excellent. 2017-2035. **91-92+?**



Note the lack of Sancerre appellation on the two examples of 2002 above- two of the very best wines in the tastings.

1996 Sancerre “Monts Damnés” Cuvée Spéciale- François Cotat

This is the only vintage of Cuvée Spéciale I have ever seen produced by the Cotat family from the Monts Damnés vineyard, but there may have been others. 1996 was a botrytis year in Sancerre and there may well also be a Cuvée Spéciale bottling from La Grande Côte as well in this vintage, but I have never seen it. In any event, the 1996 Monts Damnés “Cuvée Spéciale” is utterly stunning, trading more on its pristine expression of minerality and its utter precision and purity of fruit than I would have ever imagined possible in this vintage! The bouquet soars from the glass in a blaze of gooseberry, chalky minerality, beeswax, a touch of almond, limepeel, white flowers and a lovely esthery topnote redolent of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very modestly sweet (particularly for a Cuvée Spéciale), with a lovely core, laser-like focus, zesty acids and simply stunning length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This may well be my favorite example of Cuvée Spéciale I have ever tasted from the Cotat family! 2017-2060. 96.

1989 Sancerre “Monts Damnés”- François Cotat

The 1989 vintage in Sancerre was absolutely extraordinary in quality, so it comes as no surprise that the Monts Damnés from this vintage is drinking so beautifully! The bouquet is deep, complex and tertiary in its blend of lime, orange blossoms, fresh-cut grass, chalky minerality, gentle botanicals and plenty of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly suave on the attack, with great purity and focus, still plenty of mid-palate

concentration, vibrant acids and a very, very long, complex and seamless finish. This wine has probably been at its zenith for a decade, but still has many, many years ahead of it and there is emphatically no rush to drink it over the coming years! Given how well this wine is showing today, I start to wonder if I have been too conservative with my projected windows of drinkability for the younger vintages! 2017-2040. **96.**

François Cotat Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”

François Cotat farms ninety *ares* in the Chavignol vineyard of Culs de Beaujeu. When he and his cousin Pascal split the family vineyards, François received all of the Culs de Beaujeu, presumably because it was half the size of the other two cru holdings of the family and less than half a hectare of vines would have been deemed too small for each cousin to exploit. I do not know how François’ receiving all of the family’s parcel in this vineyard was settled (did Pascal get larger portions of Monts Damnés and Grande Côte, or was their some sort of cash settlement for François getting the vines in the Culs de Beaujeu?), but this bottling has been a part of François Cotat’s portfolio since 1998 and his cousin does not make this wine. These are now the oldest average vines in the domaine’s portfolio, after some significant replanting in François’ parcel in Grande Côte, with the vines in Culs de Beaujeu now averaging forty-five years of age. This is always the tightest and least expressive of the three bottlings from François Cotat in its youth, which may account for its slightly lower profile amongst the three single vineyard wines in the marketplace. The relative reticence this wines displays in its youth is a reflection of the northwesterly exposition of this vineyard, which takes longer to show all of its true colors, but which eventually is every bit as complex and magical as the other two single vineyard bottlings here. I have never had any really old examples of the Cotat bottling of Culs de Beaujeu, so I do not know how it evolves with long-term cellaring, but I am sure it is a great, great wine at age thirty or forty! Perhaps, in this age of global warming, this is destined to eventually become the most sought after of the three single vineyard wines from François Cotat?

2010 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- François Cotat

The 2010 Culs de Beaujeu here shows that it hails from a very ripe vintage, as there is a bit of residual sweetness still in evidence on the palate and a bit of background heat on the finish. I suspect that both of these characteristics will fade a bit over time. The bouquet is really very lovely already, offering up scents of yellow fruit, beeswax, cut grass, tangerine, chalky minerality, anise and a topnote of freshly-culled tarragon. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a plump core, fine underlying soil signature and very good length and grip on the focused finish. To my palate, the residual sugar here is still too pronounced for current drinking and I would opt for burying bottles for another five to ten years in the cellar before revisiting this wine, just so some of that the perception of residual sweetness can fade a bit with bottle age. It will be a very tasty wine in the fullness of time. 2023-2050+.

2008 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- François Cotat

The 2008 Culs de Beaujeu from François Cotat is destined for greatness, but it is still early days for this wine and it deserves to be left alone in the cellar for several more years to come. The bouquet offers up a youthful and classic constellation of yellow fruit, beeswax, anise, a touch of petrol, chalky minerality and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, deep and racy, with a great core, outstanding transparency, snappy acids and superb grip on the very long and nascently complex finish. Just be patient with this wine, as it will be

dramatically better to drink five to ten years down the road than it is today and is likely to be one of the great classic vintages of Culs de Beaujeu produced here in the last quarter century! 2025-2065+. **94+**.

2007 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- François Cotat

All of the 2007s from François Cotat are drinking beautifully at age ten, and it is awfully hard to keep one’s hands off of them. The Culs de Beaujeu offers up a wide open and very classy nose of lemon, tangerine, beeswax, chalky soil tones, anise and a lovely floral topnote that hints at acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a lovely core, great transparency, impeccable balance and a very long, very refined and complex finish. Great juice! 2017-2045+. **94**.

2006 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- François Cotat

The 2006 Culs de Beaujeu cannot totally escape the shadow of its very warm growing season, but the wine has evolved so beautifully over the eleven years since its harvest that it augurs very well for the future development of some of these other more recent, warm vintages. The bouquet of the ’06 is really pretty today, offering up scents of pear, lemon, beeswax, chalk, spring flowers and anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of ripe fruit, fine soil signature and a very long, vibrant and gently warm finish. One of the results of the warm vintage here is that the Culs de Beaujeu is fully mature already, at age eleven, and probably will not be as long-lived as more classically balanced vintages, but it is a very tasty glass of wine today. 2017-2035. **92**.

2005 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- François Cotat

The cooler aspects of the microclimate of the Culs de Beaujeu are evident in this stunning 2005 version, with the wine showing a nice touch of yellow fruit here that is somewhat unexpected in the ripe vintage. The superb nose jumps from the glass in a mix of lemon, grapefruit, chalky minerality, incipient beeswax, white flowers and orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays outstanding mid-palate depth, with racy acids, laser-like focus and grip and a long, cool and classy finish. This is simply a stunning wine! 2017-2050. **95**.

2002 Sancerre “Culs de Beaujeu”- François Cotat

Again, this is officially “Vin de Table”, but it is also a superb expression of Culs de Beaujeu. The wine is drinking beautifully at age fifteen, jumping from the glass in a mix of tangerine, lemon, chalky minerality, a touch of anise, spring flowers and a gently more musky floral tone redolent of acacia blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full, complex and rock solid at the core, with plenty of ripe fruit, fine soil signature, superb acids and lovely length and grip on the very gently warm finish. Not a classic vintage like 2007, but a very, very good wine into its plateau of maturity. 2017-2040+. **93**.



François Cotat Sancerre “la Grande Côte”

After splitting up the family vineyards with his cousin Pascal, François Cotat ended up with ninety *ares* here in this beautiful vineyard in the neighboring village of Amigny. As I mentioned in my article on Gérard Boulay in the last issue, despite this vineyard carrying over into the neighboring village of Amigny, it lies on the same towering slope of Kimmeridgian limestone that houses Chavignol’s two greatest vineyards of Monts Damnés and Culs de Beaujeu, and in fact, most commentators on Sancerre simply assume that this vineyard also lies within the communal boundaries of Chavignol. When François Cotat first inherited his rows of vines here, these were the oldest vines of the domaine, with the average age fully sixty years of age. However, he has had to replant part of the vineyard over the last decades, so that now the average age of the vines here is down to twenty years of age, though the quality of the resulting wine has not changed at all to my palate. La Grande Côte shares a due south exposition with Monts Damnés, so ripeness here was always optimal in the days of Paul and Francis Cotat, but may have become more of a mixed blessing as we learn to live on a warmer planet in this age of climate change. Traditionally, bottlings of Cuvée Spéciale or Cuvée Paul have always hailed from this vineyard, and I believe this is still the case, though I do not have any confirmation of this from the domaine. The only exception to this I have ever seen was in the botrytis year of 1996, when there was a Cuvée Spéciale from the Monts Damnés. This is still the most highly sought after of the three single vineyard bottlings from François Cotat, and I have more of this wine in my cellar than I do from the other two crus, but I am beginning to think that I would be

well-served to start to add more Culs de Beaujeu to my purchasing patterns in future vintages, as its slightly cooler microclimate may well give it an advantage of global warming continues on unabated.

2012 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 2012 vintage is pretty ripe in la Grande Côte, but my gut feeling is that with sufficient bottle age, this will evolve in a very positive direction and the ripeness level will be less of a factor. Today, this wine shows its residual sweetness quite a bit, as Monsieur Cotat did not want to allow the alcohol to get too high, and this needs to evolve with bottle age before this perception will start to recede. The bouquet is complex and vibrant, offering up scents of tangerine, lime, gooseberry, white flowers, chalky minerality and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows quite a bit of sweetness on the attack, with a good core, great cut and grip and absolutely superb backend mineral drive on the very long, focused and snappy finish. With bottle age, the wine should dry out a bit stylistically and it should prove to be a long-lived vintage of la Grande Côte. 2021-2045+. **92+**.

2010 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The la Grande Côte from François Cotat shows the most precision and refinement on the nose of any of these cranky 2010s, but it also has the more residual sugar of the three single vineyard bottlings. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a lovely blend of pink grapefruit, a touch of pineapple, gorgeous minerality, citrus peel, gentle grassiness and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full, deep and nascently complex, with a plush core of fruit, a lovely undertow of minerality, a fair bit of backend sweetness and a very long, zesty and nascently complex finish. Given how the perception of sweetness has dissipated in older vintages that started out life with residual sugar, such as the 2002s, I like the chances of this wine eventually blossoming into a truly superb bottle. But, give it some time in the cellar! 2023-2060. **93+**.

2009 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 2009 la Grande Côte from Domaine Cotat is listed at a touch less octane than the 2009 Monts Damnés, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol, though there is some perceptible heat poking out on the finish. The bouquet today has blossomed nicely and is really quite stunning, offering up a vibrant and fairly tropical blend of pear, acacia blossoms, limestone minerality, a touch of fresh coconut, discreet grassiness and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite precise in its focus, with plenty of ripe fruit at the core, good soil signature and a very long, succulent and gently warm finish. I like the overall balance of the ripe 2010 a tad better than the 2009 version, but this is evolving in a very positive direction and is going to be a good drink for those that do not mind that bit of backend alcohol. 2017-2045. **92+**.

2008 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 2008 vintage of la Grande Côte is a classic in the making. The bouquet is still youthfully reticent, but with all of its constituent components now front and center, as it jumps from the glass in a mix of tangerine, lime, crystalline minerality, gentle smokiness, candied lime peel and very discreet botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely layered with ripe fruit, with a fine core, a bright, bouncy backend and excellent length and grip on the cool and classy finish. Fine, fine juice in the making! 2017-2050. **94+**.

2007 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 2007 la Grande Côte is now drinking with the refined harmony of maturity, but will continue to cruise along with great style for decades and decades to come. The bouquet offers up an excellent constellation of pear, tangerine, lime peel, crystalline minerality, a touch of tarragon, beeswax, smoke and other la Grande Côte botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with good intensity at the core, lovely focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. I suspect this will not be anywhere near as long-lived as the tighter-knit 2008 version, but la Grande Côte has such a superb track record of aging *chez* Cotat that I would hate to bet against this wine living to a ripe old age. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2050. **94+**.

2006 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

François Cotat’s 2006 la Grande Côte is now fully mature and is a very successful example of how these hot, ripe vintages can also find their way here with sufficient bottle age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a wide open mix of pear, anise, chalky minerality, incipient notes of beeswax, dried flowers and blossoming botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and plush on the attack, with a full-bodied format, a solid core, still a bit of backend residual sweetness, but very good length, grip and complexity on the long finish. Not my favorite vintage of la Grande Côte here, but a very tasty wine. 2017-2035. **91**.

2005 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 2005 vintage of la Grande Côte from Monsieur Cotat is utterly stunning. The youthful nose offers up a very deep blend of pink grapefruit, orange peel, chalky minerality, smoke, a touch of botanicals, blossoming notes of beeswax and a lovely topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and youthfully rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, outstanding focus and grip and a very long, ripe and mineral-driven finish. This seems quite similar to the 2005 Monts Damnés in terms of octane, but the wine is even more precise and seamless. A great la Grande Côte vintage in the making! 2020-2055. **96**.

2004 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 2004 Sancerre “la Grande Côte” from François Cotat is utterly brilliant. The great nose soars from the glass in a blaze of tangerine, lime, complex, chalky minerality, a touch of licorice, Grönhäuser botanicals and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very crystalline in personality, with a rock solid core, laser-like focus and a very, very long, complex and vibrant finish. This is just on the cusp of its peak of maturity and still has many decades of brilliance ahead of it, but it is a very, very compelling glass of wine today! 2017-2045. **95+**.

1999 Sancerre “la Grande Côte”- François Cotat

The 1999 vintage of la Grande Côte from François Cotat is outstanding and now at its apogee of peak drinkability. The very sophisticated nose offers up a fine aromatic constellation of lime, botanicals, crystalline minerality, tangerine, citrus blossoms, a touch of caraway seed and a nice topnote of chalk dust. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with bright acids, excellent focus and balance and plenty of complexity on the very long, zesty and wide open finish. A beautiful bottle in the full bloom of maturity, but with at least several decades of life still ahead of it. François Cotat’s steady hand at the helm was already quite evident by this time, having been in the cellars with his father and uncle since 1987, and he has really done a nice job with this 1999 la Grande Côte! 2017-2035+. **94**.

François Cotat Sancerre Rosé

François Cotat's Sancerre Rosé is my absolute favorite bottling of Rosé produced anywhere in the world. Like all of the domaine's wines, this is a tightly-knit and structured wine out of the blocks and it absolutely demands time in the cellar before it is ready to drink, and often when it is fully mature, it also needs some extended time in the decanter prior to serving to allow the wine to blossom fully. As I mentioned above, it is made from the half hectare of pinot noir vines that he owns on the flatter section of vineyard land in Chavignol, east of the village in the direction of the town of Sancerre. The soil here is *les caillottes* (small limestone pebbles), rather than the *Terres Blanches* (Kimmeridgian limestone) so typical in the hillside vineyards of the village, and it routinely one of the finest Sancerre rosés made in the appellation (only cousin Pascal's Rosé can approach these same lofty heights of quality). The wine is fermented, after a short skin contact, in a tartrate crystal-encrusted, old *demi-muid* that François' father and uncle probably used for the family's Rosé before him, as this is truly a well-seasoned barrel! Like all of the Cotat wines, it is fermented with indigenous yeasts and bottled to the cycle of the moon in the late spring in the year following the harvest. It starts out life tight, snappy and reticent, only reluctantly hinting at its future complexity in the first three or four years after it is bottled, and a good general rule of thumb as to when to start drinking the wine is to figure five years out from the vintage as the point to start opening the first bottle! The effects of global warming have been felt in this bottling as well, with the 2010 and 2009 versions showing more alcohol on the backend than has been customary with the Cotat Rosé, which again, might impact their customary longevity in bottle, but it will be several more years until we find out if this is to be the case. As the notes below will attest, fifteen years or more out from the vintage is still right in the prime drinking window of François Cotat's Sancerre Rosé (at least in classical vintages), and none of the oldest vintages that we tasted during our couple of marathon tastings in preparation for this article were even remotely fragile or getting to the end of the line. Based on these wines, I would have to hazard a guess that twenty-five or thirty years of life in the bottle is easily within reach of the top vintages of this iconic Rosé bottling, and perhaps they last far longer than this, but I have never had the pleasure to taste a truly old vintage of Cotat Rosé to confirm this. Over time, these wines throw a bit of sediment and should be decanted when they are older, but they also benefit from some extended aeration when they are young and really should be routinely decanted whenever they are opened.

2011 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2011 Sancerre Rosé from François Cotat is a superb young wine, which is approachable today, but really deserves some more bottle age before having at it in earnest. The bouquet offers up a fine, primary blend of tangerine, white cherry, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a bit of cherry skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a lovely core, great acids and a very long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. Drink it now, if you cannot wait, but the more rewarding course would be to leave it alone in the cellar for at least another five years! 2017-2040. **94.**

2010 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2010 Sancerre Rosé from Domaine François Cotat is riper than the 2011, but still fairly well balanced and shows fine promise for positive evolution in the bottle. The bouquet is jumps from the glass in riper blend of melon, orange peel, chalky soil tones, an exotic touch of lavender and the telltale smokiness of this bottling. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and fairly powerful in profile, with fine focus and grip, a fine base of minerality and just a

whisper of backend heat poking out on the zesty and nicely structured finish. This is not as precise as the 2011 version, and really demands a bit of time in the cellar to blossom. 2021-2040+. **92+**.

2009 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

Like the white wines from the 2009 vintage *chez* Cotat, the Rosé is also a big and fairly buxom example, with some overt heat poking out on the backend. However, like the white 2009s, it is also nicely blossomed aromatically and more appealing today than the ripe 2010 version. The bouquet here is really pretty, offering up a suave and complex blend of orange, cherry skin, coriander seed, chalk, dried flowers and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and complex, with a rock solid core, respectable soil inflection (but nowhere near as pronounced as in the 2011 or 2008 for example), with good length and grip and a bit of alcohol sticking out on the finish. Given its octane, the 2009 Rosé here will probably be pretty short-lived by the traditional standards of this wine. 2017-2027. **89**.



2008 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2008 Rosé from François Cotat is just starting to arrive at its plateau of maturity and at age nine, is drinking very, very well. The bouquet is a vibrant blend of melon, white cherries, orange peel, chalky minerality and a nice touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with crisp, zesty acids, fine focus and grip and a very long, complex and snappy finish. This is delicious today,

but is still climbing and may well be even better with another five years of cellaring! 2017-2030+. **93+**.

2007 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2007 vintage in Sancerre has aged with great aplomb and this is very evident in this outstanding Rosé from Monsieur Cotat. The bouquet shows riper fruit tones than the excellent 2008 paired up with it, wafting from the glass in a mix of tangerine, caraway seed, gentle floral tones, chalky minerality and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthful in profile, with a great core, bright acids, laser-like focus and just a whisper of backend residual sugar still showing on the very long and beautifully balanced finish. I would opt for giving this great vintage of Cotat Rosé just a few more years' worth of bottle age to allow the wine to more fully integrate its constituent components into a seamless whole. This is a great, great vintage for this bottling! 2020-240. **95**.

2006 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2006 Sancerre Rosé from François Cotat is now into its apogee of peak drinkability, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. This wine was showing a bit evolved when first decanted, but with fifteen or twenty minutes of aeration, the fruit component roared to the fore and the wine showed stunningly well! The bouquet is a fine and complex blend of melon, orange peel, beeswax, a touch of forest floor, chalk and coriander seed as a topnote. On the palate the wine deep, full and *à point*, with fine mid-palate intensity, good acidity and fine focus and grip on the long, complex and zesty finish. 2017-2028+. **94**.

2005 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

François Cotat's 2005 Rosé is also pretty ripe, but it seems to handle its ripeness better than either the 2009 or 2010 versions, or is it simply that this wine has now had a dozen years of bottle age? In either case, this is really an excellent vintage for this cuvée, offering up a superb bouquet of blood orange, a touch of rhubarb, plenty of smokiness, citrus peel, chalky soil and a hint of what seems likely to be *sous bois* in the years to come. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, but not as resolved as it is on the nose, with a slightly angular aspect to the wine that suggests a bit more time in the cellar is warranted. The finish is very long, the core is rock solid and the focus and balance here is exemplary, so all that is needed is just a bit more patience to allow the wine to reach its peak. 2020-2045. **93**.

2004 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2004 Sancerre Rosé from François Cotat is an outstanding wine in the making, and at age thirteen it is at its sweet spot in its evolution. The nose delivers a bright and complex constellation of *fraises du bois*, blood orange, chalky soil tones, coriander seed, dried flowers and a nice touch of salinity in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with a rock solid core, great soil inflection, zesty acids and superb cut and grip on the long and *à point* finish. Great juice. 2017-2025+. **95**.

2003 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

Given the very hot summer of 2003, I did not have great expectations for this wine, but it showed beautifully and was far above anything I could have hoped for. The bouquet is very, very pretty and vibrant, offering up scents of watermelon, orange peel, chalky soil tones and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly complex, with a good core, crisp acids and a long, classy and quite vibrant finish. This will not be a long-lived vintage of Cotat Rosé, but the wine has lift and energy that belies the heat of '03! 2017-2025. **92**.

2002 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

2002 is such a superb vintage in Sancerre and the François Cotat Rosé is a ringing success in this vintage. The wine is now fully mature on both the nose and palate, but complex, vibrant and extremely attractive on both the nose and palate. The bouquet shows more pinot noir elements than most vintages of this bottling, wafting from the glass in a mix of cherries, blood orange, chalky soil, smoky overtones and a touch of cinnamon stick in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and juicy in personality, with a fine core, vibrant acids and a very long, very complex and classy finish. A great wine at its apogee and with years and years of life still ahead of it. 2017-2030. **94.**

2001 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2001 Sancerre Rosé from François Cotat has deepened noticeably in color as the years have gone by and is now almost a light red wine in color, but the wine is still in its plateau of peak maturity and has decades of life still ahead of it. The nose wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of orange peel, a touch of watermelon, chalky minerality, a potpourri of spice tones, dried flowers and just a whisper of leather. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complete, with a lovely core of fresh fruit, fine expression of *terroir*, still quite sound acids and impressive length and grip on the very nicely balanced and complex finish. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **92.**

2000 Sancerre Rosé- François Cotat

The 2000 Sancerre Rosé is another lovely and fully mature wine from François Cotat that still has a few years ahead of it before it begins to slide down the far side of its plateau. The mature bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of white cherries, orange peel, gentle smokiness, a touch of autumn leaves, rhubarb and peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with fine focus and cut, lovely balance and complexity and a very long, still quite zesty finish. Lovely juice, but this is further along its evolutionary path than the excellent 2001 version (or at least this particular bottle was). 2017-2023. **92.**

RECENTLY- TASTED RHÔNE WINES



A few issues back, I did a feature on the superb 2013 vintage in Côte-Rôtie, which will one day be regarded as one of the modern day great years, as I anticipate that it will unfold much along the lines of the 1988 or 1991 vintages in the region. This outstanding year has been followed by two more excellent vintages in the northern Rhône, as 2014 is very high in quality, though very, very short in quantity, and 2015 is again being touted as the greatest vintage since 2010 in the region. I should note that, based on my tastings of some of the earlier-released 2015s, to my palate it is a step or two up from 2010, as the wines are cooler and more classical in profile than the more buxom and powerfully ripe 2010s that I have tasted, and at least for traditionally-inclined palates, 2015 looks likely to be finer by a good measure than 2010. As readers may recall from my recent articles on the region (primarily focused on Côte-Rôtie in the last couple of years), I am firm believer that it is not the hottest years in the Rhône these days that produce the finest wines, but rather the more measured warm vintages, such as 2013 and 2014, where longer hang time is available for a variety of reasons (like the cool and rainy midsummer of 2013), and when evenings are also cooler and the diurnal temperature swings more pronounced, so that the resulting wines often have more inherent complexity and perfume than the more robust vintages such as 2010. These days, a cooler mid-summer and a great Indian Summer to push the sugars up

over the finish line looks like the best combination, but the 2015s may prove the exception to this new rule. It was a very hot summer in the Rhône (as was the case elsewhere in Europe), but I have already tasted some superb examples of the 2015 vintage, with more moderate octane levels than one would anticipate and great purity of fruit and very good soil signatures. Much to my surprise, I am very much a fan of what I have tasted so far from 2015 and am looking forward to the release of this vintage from more of my favorite addresses in the region over the next year or two.

I tend to focus most of my attention on the Rhône these days to the northern half of the region, as the combination of global warming and the ascendancy of the riper, more modern style in many cellars in the southern half of the Rhône has left much less wine there that conforms to what I value in the world of wine. There are certainly exceptions to the modern, high-octane trend in the south (Éric Texier's beautiful southern wines immediately come to mind), but they are no longer the predominant style in the south and I did my best to focus primarily on wines from the northern half of the Rhône for this report. I should note that this article is not part of the normal flow of regional coverage each year in the newsletter, but came about more by happenstance, as someone approached me about taking a small group on a trip to Burgundy in the fall and also wanted to include a few days in the northern Rhône on the itinerary. As I have not been in the region in several years, I thought it would be prudent to get samples of some of the estates' whose wines I have liked in the past (outside of the classic Côte-Rôtie producers that I have written historical features on in the last couple of years), so that I could present a wider range of options for winery visits in the north beyond René Rostaing and the Jamet, Champet and Barge families. The couple of importers with whom I enquired about samples of current releases also sent along producers beyond which I had asked about, but this was all to the good, as I found more classically-styled wines to write about as a result. The impressively old school wines from Vidal-Fleury would be just one example.

Getting back to recent vintages, 2014 was a cooler growing season (like 2013), but with extended hang time, due to an early budbreak and very nice spring in the region, so sugars had a chance to mount in a measured and relatively relaxed fashion and the wines are really lovely as a result. Picking was done in late September in the north, and from mid-September to early October in the south in 2014, with sugars mounting to very good, but not excessive levels and alcohols generally more measured than has been the case in other recent strong vintages in the region (this is reported to be particularly true in the south, though I have not tasted many examples to confirm this assertion). In the northern half of the region, the wines are really elegant and velvety out of the blocks, recalling stylistically the 1985 vintage here, and they will be more than worthy follow-ups to the exceptional 2013s in the region. The one big negative in 2014 is the small yields, as the Suzuki fruit fly was a big problem in 2014 and careful selection to remove berries affected by the pest cost many estates up to a third of their cropload in 2014. But, this draconian selection was necessary to make great wines, and the *vignerons* who did so at least were compensated with outstanding quality wines. There is a ton to like in the 2014 northern Rhône that I have tasted and this is a vintage for classicists to look for and tuck away in the cellar, as they will reward patience with outstanding wines. I reprint below the vintage assessment of the 2013s in Côte-Rôtie below, which can be spread out to the other appellations in the north as well in this vintage, based on what I tasted for this report, and 2013 is probably even a tad better for long-term cellaring than the case for the 2014s.

The 2013 vintage in Côte-Rôtie is a great classic that does not fit the mold of many of the other recent vintages that have received abundant praise in the northern Rhône in recent times, as this is not a powerfully ripe year like 2010, but rather a supremely pure, transparent and concentrated vintage of structured wines that will take many years to truly blossom, but which promise to be absolutely dazzling at their peaks. The spring was not particularly auspicious, as the weather was cool and this got the growing season out of the blocks late, May was unbelievably rainy and flowering was not particularly fitful in early June. The rest of the month of June was not much of an improvement, causing mildew problems for *vignerons* and by the end of the month, not too many people were anticipating a great vintage. However, most *vignerons* often note that the first half of each growing season is more about quantity than quality, and as the weather turned better in July, the potential of the vintage started to inch upwards. However, unlike years such as 2009 or 2010, the back half of the summer of 2013 was not scorchingly hot, with the sunny days coupled with cooler, clear nights, so that sugars mounted fairly slowly and acidities stayed very high. At the end of August sugar accumulation was definitely lagging in the bunches, as the combination of the late start to the season, brought about by the cold and inclement spring, coupled with lower than average temperatures in the sunny days of July and August meant that a great “Indian Summer” was going to be needed in September to get the crop up to proper ripeness levels. Happily, this is exactly what producers in the northern Rhône received, as September’s weather was beautiful (though still not particularly hot) and sugars marched resolutely upwards over the course of the month, allowing for picking to get started at the very end of September or during the first week of October for producers in Côte-Rôtie.

The window for harvesting was very small in 2013, as it rained fairly heavily around the 28th of September, just as the grapes were nearing the finish line of sugar accumulation, which got everyone out in the vines to start bringing in their fruit. The picking weather was okay in early October, with occasional showers, but not enough to really affect the crop adversely, but a seconde round of even heavier rainfall came in to the region mid-month. Growers essentially needed to get their fruit all in prior to the mid-month rains, which began on the 16th of October and were pretty relentless from that point forward, so it was a vintage where producers whose predilections are to let the grapes hang and get more potential alcohol did not have this option in 2013. However, if the spring had not been so cold and the flowering so erratic in early June, causing a short crop, then the vintage of 2013 would probably never have managed to get across the finish line to full ripeness, as a larger crop load would simply have not ripened up fully in the sunny days of September, given how far behind the grapes were at the end of August. So Mother Nature has to be credited, through her draconian methods of the spring and early summer, in producing such a truly superb vintage in 2013. The 2013 Côte-Rôties have outstanding depth and purity of fruit, coupled to firm chassis of tannin and outstanding transparency, and in the fullness of time, this is going to prove to be one of the most outstanding vintages of the last twenty years in the region.

The following notes are broken down into the classic divisions of north and south, and then by vintage within each half of the report. As I noted above, as I was looking to canvass primarily northern producers (with an eye towards deciding who to visit with my group) and their current releases, most of the younger wines written up below hail from this half of the Rhône. Within each vintage section, I have listed the wines from north to south, and then

alphabetically by producer. I have made no effort to sequester reds from whites from rosés, as I asked mostly for samples of red wines and the other two colors were only represented by wines from enthusiastic and generous importers beyond the wines I had enquired about. While I have not typically tasted a lot of young wines from either end of the Rhône in recent years, dipping my toe in the water in the northern half of the region this time around provided so many positive experiences that I will do my best to write about these wines with more regularity. I continue to drink a fair bit of wine from the Rhône out of my own cellar, but mostly these are mature wines and I cannot claim to have a lot of recent experience with the region. This is particularly evident when you get to the southern Rhône notes below, which feature mostly mature wines out of my own and my friends' cellars. Perhaps the very positive experiences I found with many of the recent releases from the north have their mirrors in the south, but given the length of this issue, I did not venture out to ask for more samples to see if this was the case. Perhaps the cooler 2014 growing season will be a sensible vintage to do a wider sampling of Châteauneuf du Pape, Gigondas and the like and see if there is a glimmer of light stirring here for lovers of the classically-styled wines of yesteryear. But, not in this report.

Northern Rhône

2015 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine Champet

The Champet family's la Viallière is the first bottlings from Côte-Rôtie that I have tasted from the 2015 vintage, and it is excellent. As was the case throughout all of France, the summer of 2015 was hot and dry, which may well have favored classicists like Joël Champet and his two sons, Romain and Maxime, who were wary of letting the grapes get too ripe. The 2015 la Viallière offers up a deep, ripe and classic nose of black fruit, spit-roasted game, some youthful syrah medicinal overtones, bitter chocolate, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones and (of course) a bit of youthful stemminess in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven in personality, with a firm core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This is a great wine in the making, but as is always the case with the wines from the Champets, it will demand some extended cellaring to blossom and come fully into its own. Fine, fine juice in the making. 2030-2080. **94.**

2015 Côte-Rôtie “la Porchette”- Julien Pilon

The Côte-Rôtie “la Porchette” from Julien Pilon is made up primarily of fruit from vineyards in the southern half of the Côte de Blonde in the villages of Tupin and Semons, but a small percentage of fruit from the superb Côte de Brune vineyard of Les Roziers is included in the *cépages*. The wine is raised in a combination of *barriques* and *demi-muids*, with the malo taking place in wood and the wine raised in thirty percent new oak between the two sized vessels. There is no viognier in this bottling and the grapes are entirely destemmed. The 2015 la Porchette offers up a fine, youthful and smoky bouquet of cassis, pepper, roasted gamebirds, a touch of nuttiness, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, tangy and complex, with outstanding depth at the core, fine-grained tannins and a very long, focused and vibrant finish. This is still a very young wine, but it will be outstanding in the fullness of time! 2027-2075. **93.**

2015 Le Blanc d'En Face- Domaine du Montillet (Stéphane Montez)

Stéphane Montez produces primarily Condrieu and Côte-Rôtie, but this is a VDP bottling that is composed of sixty percent Cugnette and forty percent Chardonnay, which he vinifies and

raised entirely in stainless steel tanks. The 2015 Le Blanc d'En Face comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a nose of peach, a touch of papaya, coriander seed, lovely soil tones and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long and juicy finish. This has plenty of personality and is a good value. 2017-2023. **88.**

2015 Condrieu "Côte Châtillon"- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond

The 2015 Condrieu "Côte Châtillon" from Patrick and Christophe Bonnefond is produced from thirty year-old viognier vines planted on granite soils, with the wine aged nine months in a combination of casks and four hundred liter barrels, with one-third of the oak renewed each year. The 2015 bottling is a cool 13.5 percent octane and delivers a fine bouquet of pear, acacia blossoms, honeysuckle, orange blossoms, a nice touch of soil and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, impressive purity on the attack, sound framing acids and very good length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is wide open and generous out of the blocks and will not make old bones, but for drinking over the next few years, it is a very tasty and classic example of Condrieu. 2017-2020+. **89.**

2015 Condrieu "les Grandes Chaillées"- Domaine du Montillet (Stéphane Montez)

The 2015 Condrieu "les Grandes Chaillées" from Stéphane Montez is raised in twenty percent new oak, with the balance of the cooperage older casks. The 2015 comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a classic bouquet of pear, coriander seed, lovely minerality, a touch of honeysuckle, acacia blossoms and a discreet base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely mineral in personality, with a plush core of fruit, sound acids and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is nicely structured, but also a broad-shouldered wine that will improve over the coming two or three years and then hold nicely, for several years after that. It is one of the better young examples of Condrieu I have tasted in recent times, but still just a touch four-square in style. 2017-2030+. **90.**

2015 Cornas "l'Élégance de Caillou"- Julien Pilon

The 2015 Cornas from Julien Pilon is raised entirely in *demi-muids*, of which thirty-five percent were new in this vintage. The wine is nicely old school in its octane level of thirteen percent and offers up a youthfully complex bouquet of black cherries, a bit of red currant, roasted meats, black olive, superb soil tones, just a hint of lavender, very discreet new oak tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and nascent complexity, ripe, firm tannins and a very, very long, poised and promising finish. This properly needs time in the cellar, but it is going to be a very, very refined bottle of Cornas when it is ready to drink! 2025-2065. **92+.**

2015 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc- Domaine Yann Chave

The 2015 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc from Yann Chave is a blend of seventy percent marsanne and thirty percent roussanne, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2015 is sealed under plastic cork, but was showing beautifully in early June, offering a bright and complex nose of pear, honeysuckle, fresh almond, dried flowers and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and wide open, with a good core, moderate complexity, gentle framing acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is like a baby Hermitage Blanc, but it does not have the acidity to allow the wine to develop its secondary layers of complexity with long-term aging, so it is best drunk up in the next few years. Good juice. 2017-2020. **88.**

2015 Crozes-Hermitage Blanc- Domaine Philippe et Vincent Jaboulet

The Crozes-Hermitage Blanc bottling from Philippe and Vincent Jaboulet is made entirely from thirty year-old Marsanne vines, with the vast majority of the wine (eighty percent) aged in stainless steel tanks and the malo blocked for the bottling. The 2015 version offers up a fine nose of pear, nectarine, almond, white soil tones and a topnote of honeysuckle. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature and impressive length and grip on the ripe and well-balanced finish. This listed at 13.5 percent alcohol and is probably a touch higher than that, but the non-malo style here keeps a lovely degree of freshness in the wine. 2017-2020. **89.**

2015 Crozes-Hermitage- Domaine Yann Chave

The 2015 Crozes-Hermitage from Yann Chave is a superb young bottle in the making, showing of all of the depth of ripe fruit of the best 2015s, coupled to classic structure and a fine base of soil. The youthful nose is still a bit reticent and takes some coaxing to offer up scents of cassis, grilled meats, a touch of pepper, dark chocolate, fine soil notes, violets and just a hint of apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and youthful finish. This needs time to soften, but will be very good. 2020-2040. **89.**

2015 Crozes-Hermitage “le Rouvre”- Domaine Yann Chave

The le Rouvre bottling from Yann Chave is a single vineyard cuvée from sixty year-old vines, planted on stony soils, which Monsieur Chave raises in one and two year-old *demi-muids*. The 2015 le Rouvre is a superb young wine, offering up a pure and complex nose of cassis, black raspberries, a touch of dark chocolate, grilled meats, pepper, fine soil tones, just a touch of cedar and a hint of fresh apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and focused, with a plush core of fruit, a sound chassis of ripe tannin, good acids and excellent balance and grip on the long, nascently complex finish. This has more old viney depth at the core than the regular bottling and will be outstanding when it is ready to go! 2021-2050. **92.**

2015 St. Joseph Blanc- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)

Stéphane Montez’s St. Joseph Blanc is composed of a blend of fifty-eight percent marsanne and forty-two percent roussanne, with the wine barrel-fermented and raised in a combination of *demi-muids* and *barriques*, with twenty percent of the wood new each year. The 2015 version offers up an excellent and very expressive bouquet of pear, honeysuckle, a touch of coriander seed, lovely soil tones, acacia blossoms and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature, good acids and fine focus and grip on the perfectly balanced and complex finish. This is one of the finest white wines from the Rhône that I have tasted in several years! 2017-2025. **91.**

2015 St. Joseph- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)

Stéphane Montez raises his regular bottling of St. Joseph in older *demi-muids* for fourteen months prior to bottling and his 2015 version is outstanding. This is a cool and classy example of this ripe vintage, coming in at thirteen percent octane and delivering superb purity on both the nose and palate. The classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of cassis, black raspberries, pepper, bitter chocolate, fine soil tones and roasted game. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and plush on the attack, but with excellent structure and focus, a sappy core, moderate, ripe tannins and a long, complex and tangy finish. This is outstanding juice and a stunning value! 2017-2035. **92+.**

2015 St. Joseph “Rue des Poissonniers Paris XVIIIe”- Julien Pilon

Julien Pilon is a young *vigneron* based in Condrieu, with most of his growing lineup comprised of wines white. However, he has a few choice red wine cuvées as well to augment the lineup, produced from a mixture of parcel he owns, rents or grapes he brings in. The 2015 St. Joseph from Julien Pilon was raised in thirty percent new oak, with the wine undergoing its malolactic fermentation in barrels and the octane a very cool and classy thirteen percent. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the complex bouquet offering up a pure and vibrant blend of cassis, black raspberries, dark chocolate, black olive, gentle meatiness, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice touch of nutty new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively elegant in profile, with a rock solid core, fine transparency, ripe, moderate tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced and nascently complex finish. Fine juice. 2020-2045. **91+**.

2014 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune”- Domaine Gilles Barge

The 2014 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Brune” from Gilles and Julien Barge is a great young wine in the making. The bouquet is deep, pure and properly reticent out of the blocks, offering up a nascently complex blend of black raspberries, smoked meats, youthful stems, a touch of black olive, a marvelous base of stony soil tones, pepper and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with stunning soil signature, a lovely core, firm, chewy tannins and absolutely superb length and grip on the very well-balanced, complex and youthful finish. This will need at least a dozen years in the cellar to start to blossom and twenty-plus years would be even better, but in the fullness of time, this will be an utterly classic and superb example of the great vineyard of Côte Brune. 2030-2080. **94+**.

2014 Côte-Rôtie “Colline de Couzou”- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond

The Colline de Couzou bottling from Patrick and Christophe Bonnefond is their entry level bottling of Côte-Rôtie, with the vines ranging from ten to forty years of age and the wine raised in a combination of older barrels and *demi-muids* and seeing no new oak. The Bonnefond brothers farm five and a half hectares of vines, with four and a half of these in the *Côte de Brune* vineyards of les Roziers, Côte Rozier and les Rochains (the latter two which surround La Landonne) and one hectare in the vineyard of les Semons in the far southern end of the *Côte de Blonde*. The 2014 Colline de Couzou is very classic and quite *Côte de Brune* in profile (despite including the fruit from les Semons in the blend), delivering a youthful bouquet of smoky black raspberry fruit, grilled venison, raw cocoa, pepper, black olive and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with marvelous transparency, ripe, fine-grained tannins, a good core and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This will be a very elegant expression of the vintage when it is ready to drink. 2022-2050. **91**.

2014 Côte-Rôtie “Côte Rozier”- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond

The Côte Rozier bottling from the Bonnefond brothers hails from forty-five year-old syrah vines and is raised in twenty-five to thirty percent new casks each year. The 2014 Côte Rozier comes in at a cool thirteen percent octane and offers up a superb bouquet of cassis, grilled meats, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, gentle notes of pepper and a hint of the nuttiness to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with a lovely core of fruit, superb soil signature, ripe, suave tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. This is very classy juice and I have a gut feeling that this is one of those wines that will seemingly put on weight with extended bottle age. 2023-2060. **92+**.



2014 Côte-Rôtie “les Rochains”- Domaine Patrick et Christophe Bonnefond

The Côte-Rôtie “les Rochains” from Domaine Bonnefond is from the family’s first parcel of vines, as they bought their one hectare in this superbly-placed vineyard back in the 1955. The vines’ age ranges from forty-five to seventy-five years of age and the brothers raise this wine in twenty-five percent new oak, with the remainder of the casks one wine barrels. The 2014 version is outstanding, offering up a gently oaky and quite smoky bouquet of black raspberries, dark soil tones, a bit of roasted venison, black olive, raw cocoa, nutskin and a very discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit more reserved in profile than the Côte Rozier out of the blocks, with a fine core, good soil tones, ripe tannins and a long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. This is going to be superb, and though it is certainly approachable today, it really deserves at least six or seven years in the cellar to fully absorb its touch of new wood and start to show its secondary layers of complexity. High class juice. 2023-2060. **93.**

2014 Côte-Rôtie “Village”- Stéphane Ogier

Stéphane Ogier joined his father Michel at the family winery in 1998 and has augmented the lineup at this fine estate since taking over the reins fully from his father. Today, the le Village bottling of Côte-Rôtie is made from a selection of their younger vines, with vine age ranging from five to thirty years of age for this cuvée. It includes twenty percent whole clusters and is raised in twenty percent new oak. The 2014 Le Village is a very pretty example of young Côte-Rôtie, offering up a primary bouquet of raspberries, nutskin, smoked meats, soil, a touch of

pepper and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely elegant in style, with a very respectable core, lovely balance and grip, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex finish. Due to the younger vines here, there is not the inherent sappiness at the core of the other Ogier bottlings, but this has plenty of personality and will likely put on a bit of weight with some bottle age. A very stylish *villages*. 2020-2045+. **89+**.

2014 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium”- Domaine René Rostaing

The 2014 Côte-Rôtie “Ampodium” bottling from René Rostaing is a lovely wine that seems likely to offer pretty early drinking pleasure, but also has the balance to age quite gracefully. 2014 was rainy in the first half of the growing season, with rains coming heavily right after the flowering and troubling the region until August, when things dried out and the sun came out to stay, saving the vintage, which was picked from mid-September to early October. Probably due to the rainy first half of the year, the 2014 Ampodium cannot quite match the precision and vibrancy of the 2013 version, but the wine is open, generous and extremely classy on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a fine, complex mix of black raspberry, chocolate, smoked meats, black olive, a complex base of soil, a touch of hazelnut and a discreet touch of stems in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and already hinting at the generosity to come on the attack, with a plush core of fruit, very good soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. This is really pretty easy to drink already, though it is still early days and I would tuck bottles away in my cellar for another five or six years to really let the wine blossom- though, if I spotted it on a wine list, I would not hesitate to order it! A lovely wine. 2022-2050+. **92**.

2014 Crozes-Hermitage- Vidal-Fleury

Vidal-Fleury’s 2014 Crozes-Hermitage is a nicely cool and classic example of the vintage, coming in at an even thirteen percent and offering up a gently new oaky and complex nose of cassis, raspberries, spiced meats, pepper, lovely soil tones, espresso, black olive and a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tight and tangy, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate, chewy tannins and very good length and grip on the still quite youthfully closed finish. This has depth at the core and good transparency, and once the tannins have dropped back a bit, this will be a very good wine, but it needs some time in the cellar to blossom. 2020-2040+. **89+**.

2014 St. Joseph “Cuvée du Papy”- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)

The Cuvée du Papy from Stéphane Montez is an old vine bottling of St. Joseph, with the vines ranging from forty to seventy years of age. Monsieur Montez raises the wine in one to four year-old *demi-muids*. The 2014 Cuvée du Papy is a cool customer at thirteen percent octane and offers up an excellent bouquet of black raspberries, dark chocolate, grilled meats, woodsmoke, black olive and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and complex, with a good core, modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent balance and grip on the very refined and classy finish. This is my kind of St. Joseph, with excellent intensity of flavor and without undue weight! 2017-2040. **92**.

2014 Les Hauts du Monteillet Blanc- Domaine du Monteillet (Stéphane Montez)

Stéphane Montez’s Les Haut de Monteillet Blanc is composed of one-third each of viognier, roussanne and clairette, with the wine fermented and raised in *demi-muids*. The 2014 version comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a very floral bouquet of peach, coriander seed, loads of musky floral tones, white soils and a nice touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, good soil signature,

moderate acids and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. The fairly low acidity here will want this wine drunk up over the next couple of years, but it is really tasty and impressively light on its feet. Fine juice. 2017-2020. **89.**

2013 Côte-Rôtie “la Sarrasine”- Domaine de Bonserine

Domaine de Bonserine was founded in 1972 by Alfred Gerin and an American investor. In 2006, they sold the property to Guigal. With ten hectares of vineyards, Domaine de Bonserine is now the second largest vineyard owner in the appellation. Their 2013 Côte-Rôtie “la Sarrasine” is comprised of a blend of ninety-seven percent syrah and three percent viognier, from a variety of different *lieux à dits*, with the wine raised in eighty percent new oak after being completely destemmed. The 2013 is nicely cool in profile, coming in at thirteen percent, but as one would expect, this is a modern wine in all its guises and less satisfying as a result. The bouquet is quite marked by its toasty new oak, with scents of cassis, hung game, smoke and nutskin lurking under the overly generous serving of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and bound up in its structural elements today, with a good core, firm, slightly dry-edged tannins and good length and grip on the slightly concave finish. This needs bottle age to blossom, but it is carrying a lot of lumber and it already seems that some of the great vibrancy of the 2013 vintage in Côte-Rôtie has been lost to the oak. Time will tell, but I am pessimistic that this wine will integrate its new wood with bottle age. ???

2013 Côte-Rôtie “la Viallière”- Domaine de Bonserine

The la Viallière bottling from Domaine de Bonserine is from a parcel of relatively young vines that the estate owns in this great *terroir*, as the vines were planted in 1995, so they were still a bit youthful in 2013. There is three to five percent viognier included in this blend, depending on the vintage, and the wine includes five percent whole clusters. It is raised entirely in new oak, but in six hundred and forty liter puncheons, rather than smaller *barriques*. Despite the less than twenty year-old vines here, this is far more serious to my palate than the Sarrasine 2013, as there is stuffing to carry the new wood (the larger casks clearly are helpful in this regard) and there is a very good base of soil in the wine. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex mix of cassis, grilled venison, plenty of smokiness, a touch of nutskin, superb soil tones, cocoa and a judicious framing of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with fine focus and grip, a good core and a very long, well-balanced and moderately complex finish. This is very good in its style, as the underlying *terroir* comes through very well, but I would love to see more whole clusters and the wine raised in a significant percentage of older puncheons, so that the great personality of la Viallière could take center stage. That said, this is still good juice. 2023-2060. **91.**

2013 Côte-Rôtie- Vidal-Fleury

The 2013 Côte-Rôtie from Vidal-Fleury comes in at a civilized 13.5 percent octane and offers up a lovely, youthful and quite classic bouquet of raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, black olive, a fine base of soil and a very moderate framing of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely meaty, with a good core, fine transparency, moderate tannins and a long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is not a blockbuster, but a classic bottle of Côte-Rôtie (despite its reasonably generous serving of new wood) that perfectly captures the elegance of the 2013 vintage. Good juice. 2021-2050. **90.**

2013 Crozes-Hermitage- Domaine Philippe et Vincent Jaboulet

Philippe Jaboulet and his son, Vincent, started this domaine in 2006, after the sale of the firm of Paul Jaboulet Aîné (Philippe had been in charge of the vineyard management for the family business prior to the sale). Their 2013 Crozes-Hermitage is outstanding, offering up a complex and classic bouquet of cassis, roasted venison, pepper, bitter chocolate, black olive, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with ripe, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and youthfully chewy finish. This is a serious example of Crozes that could do with some time in the cellar to soften up a bit more, but which will prove to be long-lived and excellent. 2020-2040. 91.



2012 Côte-Rôtie “Réserve”- Stéphane Ogier

The 2012 Côte-Rôtie “Réserve” from Stéphane Ogier is impressively low octane, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol. The wine is made from a variety of *lieux à dits*, with the vines averaging forty years of age and the wine is raised in twenty percent new wood. This cuvée includes seventy percent whole clusters. The 2012 Réserve offers up an excellent, youthful bouquet of red and black raspberries, pepper, spiced meats, a fine touch of stems, complex soil tones, incipient nuttiness and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a superb core, very good soil signature, fine-grained tannins and excellent length and grip on the youthful and well-balanced finish. This is far less new oaky

in personality than the wines of the decade of the 1990s here, and I really like that change. This will be a very elegant bottle of Côte-Rôtie when it is fully mature. 2024-2060. **92.**

2012 Côte-Rôtie “la Belle Hélène”- Stéphane Ogier

The Côte-Rôtie “la Belle Hélène” from Stéphane Ogier is his oldest vine cuvée, with the vines here averaging fully seventy years of age, so one would expect that this is almost entirely *Petite Sérine*. The wine includes fifty percent whole clusters and is aged in fifty percent new wood for the first twelve months of its *elevage*, after which it is racked to older casks for the last six months prior to bottling. The 2012 version is outstanding, as these old vines easily carry their fifty percent new wood (though my imagination immediately thought of this wine raised in one wine barrels!), as the bouquet offers up a deep, nascently complex and very pure constellation of smoky raspberries, red plums, a touch of black olive, spiced meats, a touch of cocoa, pepper, a very promising touch of stems, lovely soil tones and a well-done base of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is very deep, full and beautifully balanced, with excellent soil signature, fine-grained tannins, superb focus and a very long, vibrant and youthfully complex finish. There is an effortlessness to how the new wood is carried here, not to mention plenty of influence from the whole clusters, which augurs very, very well for its future development. This will be a reference point example of the vintage when it is ready to drink and well worth the price of admission! 2025-2075. **95.**

2012 Crozes-Hermitage “Nouvelère”- Domaine Philippe et Vincent Jaboulet

Philippe and Vincent Jaboulet’s 2012 Crozes “Nouvelère” bottling is the new name for the family’s parcel in Thalabert, which was the name of the bottling prior to the sale of the family firm in 2005 and is a parcel that was retained by Philippe Jaboulet after the sale. These are very old vines, ranging from fifty to eighty years of age and they have turned in a great performance in the 2012 vintage, offering up a deep and old school bouquet of cassis, smoked meats, pepper, a touch of lavender, gorgeous soil tones and a touch of dark chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant, with a fine core of fruit, outstanding transparency, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and great focus and balance on the long and nascently complex finish. This is great Crozes in the making! 2020-2045+. **92+.**

2012 Cornas- Domaine Philippe et Vincent Jaboulet

The Cornas bottling from Philippe and Vincent Jaboulet hails from a one hectare parcel of vines that they were able to purchase soon after establishing their domaine in 2006. The grapes go through a short cold soak, followed by fermentation in wooden vats, with a three to four week maceration period and *elevage* in Burgundy casks for two years, fifty percent of which are new. The 2012 Cornas is 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine, youthful nose of cassis, black raspberry, grilled meats, black olive, pepper, stony soil tones and a fairly restrained base of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, focused and full-bodied, with classically chewy young Cornas tannins, a fine core, lovely soil signature and a very long, primary and promising finish. This is good, old school Cornas that will demand fifteen or more years in the cellar to start to blossom, but it should prove to be excellent when it starts to stir from its hibernation period. If it were me, I might not use fifty percent new oak for the bottling, but there is plenty of stuffing to carry the oak (which is very well done) and it should not be an issue when the wine is ready to drink. Fine juice in the making- just add time! 2030-2065. **93.**

2012 Les Îles Feray- Domaine Jean Gonon

The 2012 Les Îles Feray from Domaine Jean Gonon is a lovely wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of cassis, black pepper, a fine base of dark soil tones, gentle meatiness and just a bit of medicinal syrah overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and quite primary on the attack, with fine acids, lovely focus and grip and a long, modestly tannic finish. Fine juice. 2014-2025+. **90.**

20012 St. Joseph Blanc “les Oliviers”- Domaine Jean Gonon

The 20012 St. Joseph Blanc “les Oliviers” from the Gonon family is excellent, and like all of their fine wines, will age very gracefully. The classy bouquet offers up a refined blend of pear, white peach, acacia blossoms, a touch of coriander, fine minerality and a whisper of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very long, with bright acids, fine focus and nascent complexity and a long, well-balanced and zesty finish. A lovely bottle in the making. 2014-2025+. **90.**

2012 St. Joseph- Domaine Dard et Ribo

In my experience, there is always a bit of bottle variation with the Dard et Ribo bottlings, but when they are spot on, they are really lovely examples of Crozes and St. Joseph. This particular bottle of 2012 St. Joseph had a bit of volatile acidity when first opened, but once this blew off, the wine delivered a fine bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, chocolate, pepper, a nice base of soil and a touch of apricot in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full. tangy and complex, with good focus and balance, suave tannins and fine length and grip on the finish. Good, honest juice. 2017-2025. **89.**

2012 Cornas “Sans Soufre”- Domaine Franck Balthazar

I always worry a bit about non-sulfur bottlings’ longevity in the cellar, but the 2012 Cornas version from Franck Balthazar is showing very nicely at the present time and looks likely to offer a pretty wide window of fine drinking. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of cassis, grilled meats, a fine base of soil, black olives, gentle medicinal tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely primary in profile, with a rock solid core, ripe, firm tannins and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. 2021-2035+? **92.**

2011 Ermitage- Domaine Philippe et Vincent Jaboulet

There can be little doubt that the fame of the Jaboulet family rests on the long and illustrious history of their bottlings from the hill of Hermitage. The Ermitage cuvée from Philippe and Vincent Jaboulet will carry on that long tradition of excellence, hailing from their parcel of just under one hectare in the *lieu à dit* of les Dionnières, with the vines averaging forty years of age. Like the Cornas bottling from the family, this is fermented in wooden vats, given three to four weeks maceration period and raised in fifty percent new oak, in 225 liter casks. The 2011 Ermitage comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine, youthful nose of cassis, pepper, hung game, superb soil tones, woodsmoke, dark chocolate and a nice framing of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively transparent in personality, with a fine core, firm, ripe tannins and impressive focus and grip on the young, nascently complex and very soil-driven finish. As is the case with the Cornas bottling from the Jaboulets, even less new oak would only result in even more *terroir* in the finished wine, but there is plenty of depth to carry the new wood here, which is done with a light hand and impeccable balance. Impressive juice for the long haul. 2027-2075+. **94.**

2011 St. Joseph- Domaine Jean Gonon

The 2011 St. Joseph from Jean Gonon is outstanding, with depth, complexity and the promise of a long and graceful evolution in the bottle. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of cassis, black raspberries, bitter chocolate, a touch of chicory, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and very suave and silky on the attack, with a rock solid core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a very long, complex and classy finish. This is the kind of St. Joseph that will make Raymond Trolat proud! 2014-2035+. **92+**.

2010 Crozes-Hermitage- Domaine Alain Graillot

The 2010 Alain Graillot Crozes-Hermitage is a lovely bottle, offering up a classic and pure bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, dark chocolate, a touch of grilled venison and pepper. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full, with a good core, ripe, suave tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced and complex finish. This is a very consistent and well-done bottling of Crozes. 2015-2025. **90**.

2007 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Jean-Paul Brun

Beaujolais *Maestro* Jean-Paul Brun very quietly makes a small quantity of Côte-Rôtie in addition to his outstanding roster of Cru Beaujolais, and his 2007 is a lovely wine. The bouquet is ripe and beautifully pure, offering up scents of cassis, a touch of raw cocoa, pepper, a fine base of soil tones, grilled meats, violets and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and pretty ripe in style, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a very long, complex finish. This is just starting to drink well, but will continue to improve with further bottle age. 2017-2040. **91+**.

2007 St. Joseph “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Jean Gonon

The Trolat family still owns their parcel of vines in St. Joseph that are now leased out to the Gonon family and on occasion, Jean Gonon will make one barrel of old vines St. Joseph as a tribute to Raymond Trolat. This was the case in 2007, when this superb St. Joseph was produced. The complex bouquet on this wine is flat out beautiful, offering up scents of dark berries, cassis, a touch of grilled meat, espresso, lovely minerality, gentle smokiness and an exotic topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very precise on the attack, with a suave palate impression, a fine core, ripe, chewy tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and very well-balanced finish. When I last drank this wine in 2014, it still needed a few years in the cellar to soften up properly, but should be starting to drink with more generosity today. 2017-2040. **93+**.

2006 St. Joseph “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Jean Gonon

The 2006 version of the Vieilles Vignes cuvée is a bit more meaty on the nose and palate than the fine 2007, but it is every bit as superb. The bouquet is a fine, still slightly reserved blend of grilled venison, cassis, dark berries, coffee grounds, woodsmoke, pepper and a complex base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, structured and rock solid at the core, with plenty of depth of fruit, firm, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the chewy and still youthful finish. This will be a terrific wine as well, but it will need a bit more time in the cellar than the 2007 version before it will start to drink with generosity. 2020-2045. **93+**.

2005 Condrieu- Domaine Yves Gangloff

The 2005 Condrieu from Yves Gangloff was fashioned at a full fifteen percent alcohol, so it is not too surprising that the wine has not lasted a decade in the bottle particularly well and is now a less than exhilarating glass of wine. The wine is quite golden in color and offers up a nose of marinated fruit tones, orange peel, white cherries and hazelnut butter. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and still reasonably complex, with framing acids, a bit of backend heat from the octane and modest length and grip. The high alcohol here is not so much felt by making the wine hot on the finish, but more so for the overt bitterness it adds to the backend. It is okay for its heady octane, but not something I would have ever put in my own cellar. 2015-2020. **84.**



One of René Rostaing's parcels in the steep, terraced vineyard of Côte Blonde.

2001 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Éric Texier

The 2001 Côte-Rôtie from Éric Texier is starting to drink beautifully today, as it has reached that crossroads of evolution where the structure still remains taught, but the tannins are starting to peel back and the wine is wide open for inspection. The utterly classic bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of raspberries, pepper, venison, new leather, coffee, stony soil tones and still a gentle topnote of medicinal syrah overtones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, moderate tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and perfectly balanced finish. This wine is on the cusp of peak drinkability, but still has room to grow a bit over the next couple of years. 2016-2035+. **93+.**

1999 Hermitage- Domaine Éric Texier

Éric Texier only made Hermitage for a couple of vintages, as he lost his source for grapes, but over the few years that he produced a bottling from this appellation, it was one of the best examples to be found. The 1999 is an utterly stunning wine on both the nose and palate, offering up an *à point* and complex bouquet of raspberries, cherries, leather, a bit of roasted game, beautiful spice tones, woodsmoke and a marvelous base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure on the attack, with tangy acids, outstanding focus and grip, moderate, melting tannins and great backend mineral drive on the very long and very classy finish. This is great Hermitage at its zenith, but with decades of life still ahead of it! 2016-2045. **95.**

1998 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Corrine et Jean-Paul Jamet

The 1998 Côte-Rôtie from Jean-Paul Jamet is now entering its apogee of peak maturity, as it is fully open and gorgeously expressive as it closes in on its twentieth birthday. The deep, complex and perfumed bouquet wafts from the glass in a stunning blend of cassis, smoked meats, raw cocoa, beautiful, gently autumnal soil tones, pepper, black olive, discreet nuttiness and a bit of cigar ash in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, seamless and meaty, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins, great focus and grip and a very, very long, soil-driven and complex finish. While this wine is now into its plateau of maturity, it is still developing and may well be even better with another eight to ten years' worth of bottle age. It is utterly classic in profile and undeniable in its beauty. 2017-2050+. **95.**

1995 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

After reporting on a couple of differently showing bottles of this wine back in 2013 (with one far more closed and grumpy than the other), I was very happy to recently drink a bottle that was spot on and singing on both the nose and palate. This particular bottle was everything one could hope for from this great property, soaring from the glass in a subtle and refined blend of raspberries, grilled meats, pepper, summer truffles, a great base of stony minerality, black olives and just a whisper of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and just entering its prime of life, with a great core, vibrant acids and outstanding length and grip on the complex and modestly tannic finish. This vintage of Chave Hermitage still has some tannin on the backend that will further fall away as the years unfold, but with a bit of decanting ahead of service, it is now starting to drink with great class. 2017-2050+. **96.**

1988 Hermitage- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

Back in Gérard Chave's day at the head of this historic family estate, there could be a bit of bottle variation with the Hermitage here, and while one was almost always guaranteed a very good bottle of Hermitage, there were different cuvées floating around in each vintage and some were "more equal than others". I have had the good fortune to drink up almost my entire case of the 1988 over the years with great pleasure, but this particular bottle was from a friend's cellar and most likely from a different batch than my box of the wine that I bought back on its release in the early 1990s. This bottle was a touch reductive out of the blocks and never quite shook this completely over the course of the hour or two that we drank it, which kept the nose a touch reserved, despite the palate absolutely singing. The bouquet on this particular bottle is deep and black fruity in profile, offering up scents of cassis, stony soil tones, bonfire, pepper, grilled

meats and a topnote of balsam bough. On the palate the wine is very deep and full-bodied, with plenty of stuffing in the mid-palate, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The wine from my case is more generous and red fruity today than this particular bottle. With this example, I would still let it sit in the cellar for a handful more years and see if it starts to truly blossom. 2021-2050. **92+?**

1986 Hermitage Blanc- Domaine Jean-Louis Chave

The 1986 Hermitage Blanc from Gérard Chave is still holding onto the far side of its plateau, but it has been fully mature for decades and is already in gentle decline. This was not a top flight vintage in Hermitage, so it was expecting a lot for this wine to still be in its prime thirty years down the road, but it retains some interest on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a mature mix of white cherries, orange rind, pit fruit, walnuts and salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fully resolved, with the fruit starting to fade a bit and allowing the alcohol to show a bit on the backend. The finish still shows good length, but is getting just a touch bitter as the fruit starts to fade away. Drink up. 2016-2020+? **85.**

1980 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Émile Champet

Both the 1980 and 1982 vintages were quite strong in Côte-Rôtie, though largely forgotten as the years have gone by. Neither year was a ripe and powerful year in the style of 1978 or 1983, but the wines from both vintages exuded lovely aromatic and flavor purity and drank quite well from an early age, but with the requisite balance to also age gracefully. Back when this wine was released, I was sadly unaware of just how good the Champet family's wines were and so I never offered it in my early merchant days, though I am sure the wine would have been readily available. I found this single bottle at auction last year and held off opening it as long as I could, but eventually had the pleasure to share it with friends this summer and found it drinking with great elegance and breed. The bouquet is a mature and vibrant blend of smoked meats, raspberries, lovely spice tones redolent mostly of cinnamon and nutmeg, hazelnuts and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully transparent, with tangy acids, fine focus and grip, still good mid-palate stuffing and a very long, complex and velvety finish. This superb bottle still has years and years of life ahead of it, but is at its peak of maturity today and drinking with great style. 2017-2035+. **92.**

1979 Côte-Rôtie- Domaine Robert Jasmin

One of my great regrets in thirty-plus years of cellaring wine is that I did not buy more wines from Robert Jasmin in my early days in the wine trade, when I sold them with regularity and did not have my act together sufficiently to put some in my cellar each vintage. I found this single bottle of the 1979 Jasmin at auction a couple of years ago and was delighted with how beautifully it showed this past February. 1979 is a good, solid vintage for Côte-Rôtie, but not a great year (perhaps analogous to the quality of the '79 vintage for Barolo for instance), but '79 Jasmin has aged beautifully and is now a fine example of a complex, middleweight at its apogee. The bouquet offers up a superb constellation of black raspberries, pepper, bacon fat, smoky overtones, a touch of green olive, a marvelous base of soil tones and just a bit of weediness still in evidence from the stem inclusion during fermentation. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows pretty good volume at the core, with melted tannins and lovely length and grip on the very well-balanced and classy finish. Lovely wine. 2017-2030+. **92.**

1970 Crozes-Hermitage- Reine Pedoque

The 1970 vintage was very strong in both the northern and southern halves of the Rhône, but I would never have thought that a simple bottling of Crozes-Hermitage from the négociant of Reine Pedoque would have this kind of aging potential! I picked up this bottle at a wine shop in Beaune on a whim, as it was cheap and I figured I might like to try something with a different *cépages* than pinot noir as some point on my tasting trip there, just for a change. The wine turned out to be surprisingly lovely and quite vigorous, offering up a complex nose of black raspberries, chocolate, a touch of pepper, bacon fat, dark soil tones and charred wood. On the palate the wine was deep, full-bodied and very suave on the attack, with a lovely core, melted tannins and impressive length and grip on the complex and very well-balanced finish. This still has plenty of life in it! Who knew? 2015-2025. **90.**

1969 Hermitage- Delas Frères

This was the first bottle of old Hermitage from Delas Frères that I had ever tasted and I was very impressed by the quality and elegance of this wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very complex and refined constellation of black cherries, leather, hung game, marvelously complex soil tones, coffee, black truffles and just a whisper or remaining pepper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, velvety and full-bodied, with a lovely core of sweet fruit, impressive soil signature, melted tannins and superb length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This wine is still at its apogee and is a seamless, poised and utterly seductive example of old school, elegant Hermitage. 2014-2030. **92.**

Southern Rhône

2016 Côtes du Rhône Rosé- Réserve Mont-Redon (Screwcap)

The 2016 Côtes du Rhône Rosé from Mont-Redon is a pretty wine, offering up a zesty nose of melon, strawberry, white flowers and a touch of soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and slightly pinched on the backend from its closure, with a good core, fine focus and a long, well-balanced finish. This will need to be drunk quickly under screwcap, but will be tasty over the next year or so. 2017-2018. **87.**

2016 Côtes du Rhône Rosé- Vidal-Fleury

The 2016 Côtes du Rhône Rosé from Vidal-Fleury is a very pretty salmon color and offers up a ripe nose of cherry skin, tangerine, a good dollop of soil and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fairly low in acids, but nicely focused, with a good core of ripe fruit and sneaky length on the wide open finish. This is very easy to drink, but with its relatively modest acidity, will need early drinking. 2017-2018. **87.**

2015 Côtes du Rhône Blanc- Vidal-Fleury

The 2015 Côtes du Rhône Blanc from Vidal-Fleury is a blend of eighty percent viognier and the balance made up of a mix of clairette, roussanne and grenache blanc. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol on the label and offers up a ripe and musky nose of peach, a touch of pineapple, honeysuckle, white soil tones and a hint of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, fairly crisp and focused, with good ripeness at the core and a long, juicy finish. This is not overly subtle in personality, but does a nice job within its stylistic idiom. 2017-2019. **87.**



2015 Gigondas- Vidal-Fleury

The 2015 Gigondas from Vidal-Fleury is a ripe and fairly pure wine on the nose, offering up scents of red and black raspberries, grilled venison, pepper, coffee grounds and a gentle touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, plump and plenty ripe, with a good core, chewy tannins, good focus and grip and a long, youthfully complex and well-balanced finish. This is listed at 14.5 percent octane, but manages its alcohol very well indeed and shows no signs of heat on the backend. This needs time, but should be a pretty good drink when it has had a chance to drop some tannin. The blend this year is seventy-five percent grenache, fifteen percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre. 2023-2045+. **88**.

2015 Vacqueyras- Vidal-Fleury

Vidal-Fleury's 2015 Vacqueyras is composed of fifty percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and twenty percent mourvèdre and is very good in this vintage. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, spiced meats, a touch of pepper and a fine base of soil that will get nicely autumnal with a bit of bottle age. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and chewy, with a plump core, some slightly gritty tannins and good length and grip on the youthful finish. This needs some bottle age to soften up on the palate, but it should be a good mouthful of wine once it has blossomed. It will never be long on finesse, but there is depth and substance here. 2020-2035+. **88+**.

2015 Ventoux- Vidal-Fleury

The 2015 Ventoux from Vidal-Fleury is listed at fourteen percent alcohol and is a blend of sixty percent syrah, thirty percent grenache and ten percent mourvèdre. The wine offers up an impressive bouquet of black raspberries, pepper, gentle meatiness, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and very nicely balanced, with a plump core, modest tannins and a long, fairly complex and nicely buxom finish. I would guess this is a touch over fourteen percent octane, but it shows no signs of heat on the backend and is a very tasty bottle for relatively near-term consumption. It is a very good value. 2017-2025. **88.**

2014 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine du Père Pape (Famille Mayard)

The 2014 Châteauneuf du Pape from Domaine du Père Pape is composed of a *cépages* of sixty percent grenache, twenty percent syrah and ten percent each of cinsault and mourvèdre. The wine is 14.5 percent octane, but handles this very well, offering up a generous nose of baked raspberries, fruitcake, *garrigue*, a bit of roasted meats and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the moderately warm finish. I would love this wine a full point lower in octane, but it really does carry its higher alcohol pretty well. 2017-2027+? **88.**

2014 Côtes du Rhône- Château Mont-Redon (Screwcap)

Mont-Redon has always made a very good and quite ageworthy example of Côtes du Rhône, so I was sorry to see the 2014 vintage of this wine bottled under a screwcap. Happily, the wine was not yet showing any signs of reduction, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of black raspberries, pepper, a bit of game, gentle scents of *garrigue* and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, peppery and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins, good focus and grip and a long, tasty finish. This is a good bottle of Côtes du Rhône, but I really wish it was bottled under natural cork. The alcohol is a very civilized 13.5 percent. 2017-2025. **88.**

2014 Côtes du Rhône “Réserve”- Château Mont-Redon (Screwcap)

The 2014 Côtes du Rhône “Réserve” from Château Mont-Redon is also bottled under screwcap, which is too bad, but it is the sorry direction of the world these days. The wine is a blend of eighty percent grenache and twenty percent syrah, all hailing from the domaine’s own vineyards. The wine again comes in at 13.5 percent and offers up a ripe bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, a touch of chocolate, grilled venison, gentle peppery tones and damp soil. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a good core of fruit, modest tannins and a bit of backend heat poking out on the long and robust finish. This seems riper than the above and does not show the same precision on the nose or palate. It is not bad, but I suspect it is closer to fourteen percent octane. 2017-2022. **87.**

2013 Côtes du Rhône- Vidal-Fleury

The 2013 Côtes du Rhône from Vidal-Fleury is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent grenache, twenty percent syrah, ten percent mourvèdre and five percent carignan. It tips the scales at fourteen percent octane. The wine delivers a ripe bouquet of cassis, pepper, hung game, coffee grounds, bonfire and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty ripe in personality, with a solid core, a bit of coarseness to the texture of its moderate tannins and good length and grip on the slightly blunt finish. The syrah component here seems to dominate the personality of the wine a bit, despite it only being twenty percent of the blend. There is plenty of stuffing here, but it is not overly charming at the present time and may still gain a bit more polish with some bottle age. 2017-2027. **86+.**

1995 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château Rayas

The 1995 Châteauneuf du Pape from Château Rayas is an outstanding wine that is just about into its plateau of peak maturity, but could still do with at least a couple more years in the cellar to allow everything to fall precisely into place. The bouquet is a classic Rayas mélange of cherries, raspberries, coffee, ground pepper, *garrigue*, roasted venison and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with moderate tannins, fine grip and a very long, blossoming and nascently complex finish. This still has a bit of chunky, muscle-bound adolescence to shake off and a few more years in the cellar should do this nicely, allowing the wine to snap into focus and start to show more of the inherent elegance of this great *terroir*. It is a ripe vintage for Rayas, but handles this very nicely indeed. 2020-2050. **94.**

1991 Côte du Rhône “Cuvée Syrah”- Château de Fonsalette

I used to drink this bottling with quite a bit of frequency in my early years in the wine trade and always enjoyed the wine, but I had not seen a mature vintage of this in many a year. The 1991 Cuvée Syrah from Jacques Reynaud continues to drink beautifully, offering up a mature, complex and still quite vibrant bouquet of cassis, black plum, *garrigue*, a touch of grilled meat, black pepper and cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full and beautifully balanced, with still a fine core of sweet fruit, just a bit of remaining backend tannin to add grip and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. Fine juice. 2015-2035. **92.**

1990 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château de Beaucastel

The 1990 Château Beaucastel is a lovely wine and is just about ready for primetime drinking, but will continue to improve over the coming five or six years and then cruise along for decades from that point forward. The bouquet offers up a fine blend of dried raspberries and red currants, roasted game, incipient autumnal tones (fallen leaves) and a potpourri of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch leathery in personality, with a good core, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the complex finish. Having had the good fortune to drink several older vintages of Beaucastel at peak maturity, my gut instinct with the 1990 would be to let it rest in the cellar for just a few more years and allow the last layer of aromatic complexity to emerge here, though it must be said that the wine is really lovely on the palate right now. 2016-2040. **92+.**

1990 Châteauneuf du Pape- Clos des Papes

The 1990 vintage of Clos des Papes is really a strong wine and is drinking very well at the present time. The bouquet offers up a fine mélange of dark berries, bonfires, roasted venison, pepper, balsam boughs and a bit of chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a fine core of fruit, still a bit of backend tannin and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice with plenty of life still ahead of it. 2016-2035. **92.**

1990 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Grand Tinel

Back in this era, I liked the wines from Grand Tinel pretty well, as they offered plenty of classic, robust Châteauneuf character at very good prices. I did not cellar them, so I never really had any sense how well they aged, so I was quite pleased when a friend put together a mini-vertical of the wines as part of a double blind tasting. The 1990 Grand Tinel is a good solid wine, but the ripeness of this vintage was not the most positive influence on the wine for the long haul, as it has gotten a bit chunky with cellaring. The bouquet is a tertiary blend of dried red berries,

fruitcake, pepper, spit-roasted game and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite four-square in profile today, with a jammy core, melted tannins and reasonable length and grip on the fairly simple finish. This okay, but the 1989 and 1981 vintages, which were paired with this, have aged more gracefully. 2015-2025. **87.**

1989 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Grand Tinel

The 1989 vintage of Grand Tinel has evolved better in the cellar than the 1990 and is really a very good drink at age twenty-six. The bouquet offers up a lovely, mature mélange of backed raspberries and cherries, hung game, a touch of pepper, a nice base of autumnal soil tones, spices and coffee. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and tertiary in profile, with a good core, a nice signature of soil, just a trace of remaining tannins and still quite good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not the most complex 1989 Châteauneuf du Pape, but a good, solid example of the vintage with plenty of life still in it. 2015-2035. **91.**

1981 Châteauneuf du Pape- Château de Beaucastel

The 1981 vintage of Beaucastel remains one of my absolute favorites, alongside of the 1989, 1970 and 1959, from this iconic Châteauneuf du Pape estate. The wine has been drinking with great distinction since the early 1990s, but continues to cruise along as if time will have no dominion over its destiny and it is more beautiful today than at any time in its long and graceful evolution in bottle. The bouquet is flat out brilliant, soaring from the glass in a pure and vibrant blend of autumn leaves, acorns, sweet dark berries, saddle leather, a touch of licorice, gorgeous soil tones, hung game and a bit of bonfire in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and extremely elegant in profile for Beaucastel, with a lovely core of fruit, beautiful complexity, melting tannins, good acids and magical length and grip on the perfectly balanced and dancing finish. Thirty-five years out from the vintage, I profoundly regret only buying one case of this wine when it was first released, as I should have salted away at least five boxes! That original case is long, long gone today, but fortunately, I still have friends that were smarter than I was back in my youth! 2016-2040. **97.**

1981 Châteauneuf du Pape- Domaine Grand Tinel

The 1981 vintage of Grand Tinel has stood the test of time very well and is drinking with plenty of character at age thirty-four. The bouquet is more black fruity in profile than the 1990 or 1989 versions, offering up scents of dark berries, pepper, coffee, an exotic touch of mint, hung game, autumn leaves and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully resolved, with still good depth at the core, melted tannins and a long, complex and really well-balanced finish. Good juice! 2015-2030. **92.**

1979 Châteauneuf du Pape “Les Grappes des Papes”- Paul Jaboulet Aîné

The 1979 Châteauneuf du Pape “Les Grappes des Papes” from Paul Jaboulet is an excellent wine that is fully mature, but still retains plenty of vibrancy and has plenty of life still ahead of it. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a beautifully resolved blend of black cherries, pepper, dark soil tones, roasted venison, lovely spices, coffee and a topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and well-balanced, with melting tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and *à point* finish. There seems like there could be just a touch of new oak influence here on both the nose and palate, but I have no idea of Jaboulet was using some new casks for this bottling back in the day. In any event, it is fine juice and quite classic in profile in all other aspects. 2015-2035. **93.**

Dessert Wines

2014 Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise- Vidal-Fleury (375 ml.)

The 2014 Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise from Vidal-Fleury is a very pretty wine, but as is typical of these fortified wines, it is just a touch spirity right now. The vibrant bouquet offers up scents of pear, coriander seed, acacia blossoms and just a hint of beeswax. On the palate the wine is fullish, focused and even more expressive than the youthful nose, with lovely flavors, but just a bit of alcohol poking out on the long and juicy finish. I imagine that the spirit here will become less obvious as the wine has a chance to develop in the bottle, but it is the touch of backend heat today that keeps my score down a bit. 2017-2030+. **87.**

1995 Chapoutier Vin de Paille

This is a pretty good bottle from a producer that generally has not impressed me in many, many years. The nose offers up a lovely, mature blend of backed peaches, cherries, barley sugar, orange peel and a touch of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately complex, with respectable framing acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good solid effort, but it is not quite first division juice. 2016-2025+. **90.**

THE 2015 VINTAGE FROM DOMAINE CLOS DE LA CHAPELLE



Due to my knee surgery in March of this year, I did not have an opportunity to make my customary second trip to Burgundy in the spring to finish up my cellar visits to taste the 2015s and consequently missed many of my favorite domaines this year. I was very lucky that Mark O'Connell, the owner of Domaine Clos de la Chapelle in Beaune, offered to send their 2015s to my office here in New York, so that I could have a look at the vintage, as this is usually one of my very first stops on my spring trip to Beaune. Domaine Clos de la Chapelle is a relatively new domaine in Burgundy, but in name only, as it had been previously known as Domaine Louis Boillot up until 2010 (not to be confused with the other Domaine Louis Boillot, based now in Chambolle-Musigny), when an American Burgundy lover, Mark O'Connell, purchased the tiny estate and renamed it after its small monopole vineyard in Volnay, the Clos de la Chapelle. The estate has expanded a bit with each passing year since Mark first purchased the property and now is comprised of four hectares of vines, spread amongst a dozen excellent premier and grand crus appellations in the Côte de Beaune. Domaine Louis Boillot had originally been created all the way back in 1865, but for much of the last twenty years of its existence, it had quietly sold almost all of its production off to private clients in Europe, so it was not a well-known domaine prior to Mark O'Connell's purchase of the estate. The technical team here, headed by Dimitri Bazas (who is also Cellar Master at Maison Champy) has been inspired since the very first vintage of 2010 and Domaine Clos de la Chapelle it the ground running and has quickly becoming one of the superstar domaines in Volnay.

In addition to the small monopole premier cru of Clos de la Chapelle, the estate also started in 2010 with parcels of vines in the Volnay premier cru of la Carelle Sous la Chapelle and the fine Pommard premier cru vineyard of Chanlins. At the outset, this only amounted to 1.25 hectares of vines, but Mark O'Connell has added parcels of well-placed, old vines whenever it has been possible, and the domaine has slowly expanded with each passing year and now totals four hectares of vines. The domaine's namesake vineyard of Clos de la Chapelle in Volnay sits just on the southern edge of the Clos de la Bousse d'Or, with a slightly higher elevation than its more famous neighbor and a very refined base of soil. Since its inaugural vintage under Mark's ownership, the wine has been outstanding and is one of the most elegant expressions of premier cru to be found in the village of Volnay. By the time of the 2013 vintage, the domaine had significantly expanded its lineup to include a Beaune Blanc bottling from the premier cru vineyard of les Reversées, produced from a quarter hectare of twenty-five year-old chardonnay vines; a cuvée of Volnay "Taillepieds" produced from sixty-five year-old vines (and beautifully situated between the parcels of Domaine de Montille and Domaine d'Angerville); Pommard "Grands Epenots" (twenty-five year-old vines) and three grand cru bottlings from the hill of Corton. These are a parcel fifty year-old vines in the *lieu à dit* of Rognet (right next to Jean-Nicolas Méo's old vines here), forty-five year-old vines in Bressandes and thirty *ares* of forty-five to fifty year-old vines in Corton-Charlemagne over on the Pernand side of the hill. The 2014 vintage saw another white wine arrive at the domaine, as a small parcel of thirteen *ares* of vines in the fine Pernand-Vergelesses premier cru of Sour Frétilles were added, as well as a red from the Beaune premier cru of les Teurons (sixty year-old vines), and in 2015 a second Beaune premier cru in the vineyard of Champs Pimont (sixty-three *ares* of forty-five to fifty year-old vines) has rounded out the lineup. Interestingly, Mark O'Connell had bought the plot of vines in Champs Pimont all the way back in 2011, but due to the consistent hail damage in this vineyard in 2012, 2013 and 2014, the 2015 vintage was the first where they were able to produce a wine from this parcel!

The domaine's vineyards are farmed on a day to day basis by Maison Champy and the wines are made a new *cuvée* adjacent to the Champy cellars in the center of Beaune. The vineyards had been farmed organically for the last several years of the Boillot's tenure, and since Monsieur O'Connell has purchased the estate, they are now all in the process of conversion to biodynamique farming. The vines in the three original parcels here were all old, with both the parcel in Carelle Sous la Chapelle and the Clos de la Chapelle over fifty-five years of age, and the plot in Chanlins in excess of eighty-five years old- a true Vieilles Vignes! The red wines at Domaine Clos de la Chapelle receive a short cold soak prior to the onset of fermentation, with the amount of whole clusters varying between each cuvée and dependent on the style of each growing season, with the string of hailed upon vintages in the Côte de Beaune in recent years cutting back on the amount of stems included in several of the wines. When I asked Mark O'Connell about his philosophy about whole clusters, he responded that "in general, I have always liked wines made with some whole clusters, but we are not dogmatic about this at all and it really depends on the style of the year and the quality of the stems that come in from the vineyard." He continued, "I think that we will probably always de-stem the Clos de la Chapelle bottling one hundred percent, as I really like the elegance that this wine shows without any whole clusters, but for many of the other cuvées, they are likely to include at least some whole clusters in most years." The domaine prefers to keep the percentage of new oak to a low level, with the target percentages probably twenty percent for the premier crus and a third to forty

percent for the grand crus, but with all of the miniscule crops in the Côte de Beaune in recent vintages, this has varied a bit, as when one has two casks of a given wine, the choices are only zero, fifty or one hundred percent new oak. In many recent vintages, the Domaine Clos de la Chapelle has been one of the earlier bottlers, with the premier crus often bottled in November or December following the vintage and the grand crus early the following spring.

As far as the 2015s are concerned, this is the very finest vintage I have yet tasted from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle, and I have been a fan here since their very first vintage of 2010! Because of the combination of low juice to skin ratios in 2015, not to mention the need of the vineyards to recover from all of the hail battering of the last several years, yields in 2015 in the domaine's parcels of vines averaged only twenty-two hectoliters per hectare. The estate started picking their red grapes on September 4th and finished by the 10th in this vintage, with the last of their white grapes taken from their parcel of Corton-Charlemagne in Pernand on September 15th of 2015. Like so many of the other very successful producers in this vintage, Mark O'Connell and Dimitri Bazas sought to be very gentle with their extraction of the wines during the fermentation, as Mark noted that "with the small berries, there was already plenty of concentration here and what we needed to safeguard was the elegance in the wines." The reds are stunning and will be cellar classics, with outstanding structures and aromatic complexity and the ability to age gracefully for decades and decades. The white wines will not be anywhere near as long-lived, but they are gorgeous expressions of the vintage, with ripe, very pure fruit beautifully framed by complex minerality and plenty of zesty acidity. They are light on their feet and irresistible. As I was tasting through the white wines from Clos de la Chapelle in preparation for this report, it struck me that wines in this style from the 2015 vintage will be the most delicious young white Burgundies for early drinking since the lovely 1992s were released all those years ago! A hearty congratulations to Mark and Dimitri and their team on this stunning lineup of 2015s. If you have not yet made the acquaintance of the wines from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle, make every effort to search out any of these superb 2015s, as this is one of the most exciting domaines in all of the Côte de Beaune today!

Vins Rouges

2015 Beaune "Champs Pimont"- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

2015 is the first vintage of Champs Pimont produced from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle, despite the parcel having been purchased in 2011! The domaine now owns .63 hectares of nearly fifty year-old vines in this fine premier cru vineyard, which lies mid-slope, just south of les Teurons and les Cras. The domaine's 2015 Champs Pimont is a ripe and quite pure wine, offering up a sappy nose of plums, black cherries, chocolate, iron-flecked dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush at the core, with good soil signature, suave, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the ripe and nascently complex finish. This is a classic, broad-shouldered 2015 that probably comes in close to fourteen percent octane and will give pleasure early, but should also age very nicely. It is the ripest of the range of 2015s from the domaine, but shows no signs of *sur maturité* and is impressively pure and voluptuous in style. 2020-2050. **90.**

2015 Beaune "Teurons"- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The Beaune "Teurons" bottling was new from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle in the 2014 vintage, and their second effort from this vineyard is excellent. The team here farms a quarter hectare of sixty year-old vines in Teurons, which has more limestone in its clay than in the

neighboring Champs Pimont. There were two barrels of Teurons this year in the cellars, with one of them new. The bouquet of the 2015 Teurons is pure and more refined in profile than the Champs Pimont, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, plums, cocoa powder, a beautiful base of soil, a touch of gamebird and a discreet framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with ripe tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex and very classy finish. I love the synthesis here of the elegant style of the domaine and the plush character of the vintage. 2022-2055. **91+**.

2015 Volnay “en Carelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The domaine’s vines in en Carelle range from these fifty-five to sixty years of age, and as I mentioned last year, they are planted north-south, rather than the customary east-west. The 2014 here turned out really well, particularly considering the hail that hit this vineyard, but the 2015 version is even a small step up in quality and really an exceptional young Volnay. The nose is deep, pure and very classy, offering up scents of red plums, black cherries, raw cocoa, incipient *pigeon*, woodsmoke, complex soil tones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is pure, complex and full-bodied, with great velvety elegance on the attack, a sappy core, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the very long and well-balanced finish. This tastes as if it were picked ahead of the two Beaune premier crus and at the peak of perfect ripeness. 2023-2060. **93**.

2015 Volnay “Clos de la Chapelle”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The domaine’s flagship wine, the 2015 Clos de la Chapelle *monopole* is absolutely superb, with a complex nose of cherries, plums, woodsmoke, raw cocoa, a complex base of dark soil tones, hints of cinnamon to come, cedar and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, suave and nicely reserved in personality, with a superb core of fruit, outstanding soil inflection, ripe, seamless tannins and lovely grip and length on the tangy, focused and nascently complex finish. This will need a few years longer in the cellar than the very good En Carelle, but it will be the better wine in the fullness of time. The vines here are fifty-five years of age and the 2015 version was raised in twenty percent new oak. This has been a great addition to the top bottlings in Volnay since its inaugural vintage of 2010, but the 2015 Clos de la Chapelle is clearly the finest vintage yet since Mark O’Connell resuscitated this domaine a half dozen years ago. *Toute en finesse* and superb Volnay! 2025-2065+. **94**.

2015 Volnay “Taillepieds”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

As readers may recall, the Taillepieds here debuted in 2013, with the vines in this .47 hectare parcel averaging sixty-five years of age and lying between the rows of Domaines de Montille and Marquis d’Angerville. The 2015 Taillepieds is excellent and very pure in personality, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a youthful blend of black cherries, cassis, incipient gamebird, lovely minerality, woodsmoke, a nice touch of stems and a very stylish base of lead pencilly new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and superbly balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, great soil signature, firm, fine-grained tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long, complex and very, very promising finish. This may well prove to be the very finest expression of Taillepieds produced in Burgundy in 2015! 2025-2075. **94+**.



2015 Pommard “Chanlins” Vieilles Vignes- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

Chanlins is one of my favorite vineyards in Pommard, as both the premier cru and *villages* sections of the vineyard produce very elegant interpretations of Pommard. The eighty-six year-old vines here have really excelled in 2015, with the wine offering a great combination of sappy red fruit, superb transparency and a very elegant structural chassis- particularly for young Pommard! The bouquet is nicely reserved, but also deep and sappy, offering up scents of red plums, cherries, gamebird, a touch of nutskin, violets, a marvelous base of soil, just a hint of mustard seed, cedar and raw cocoa. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, but also very nicely reserved in profile out of the blocks and built for the long haul. The tannins here are ripe, fine-grained and beautifully integrated, with good acids, excellent focus and a very, very long, perfectly balanced finish giving this wine superb potential. This is every bit as refined in personality as the top Volnays here this year! 2025-2075. **94.**

2015 Pommard “Grands Epenots”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The Grands Epenots bottling from Clos de la Chapelle hails from just under a quarter hectare of vines in this superb premier cru, with the vines here amongst the youngest the domaine farms, with the vineyards now twenty-five years of age. The 2015 Grands Epenots is another absolutely outstanding example of the vintage from Clos de la Chapelle, offering up great purity to go along with perfectly ripe fruit and exceptional expression of *terroir*. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine constellation of sappy red and black cherries, gamebird, dark chocolate, superb soil tones, fresh thyme, an exotic touch of lavender, a bit of bonfire and a discreet framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is a bit more reserved than the Chanlins, but also a very elegant interpretation of this vineyard, with its full-bodied format offering a superb

core, lovely soil signature, ripe, fine-grained tannins and outstanding length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This will need a few more years than the Chanlins to start to stir, but it will be every bit as marvelous at its apogee. 2028-2075. **94.**



The exceptional Volnay premier cru Monopole vineyard of Clos de la Chapelle.

2015 Corton “Rognet”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2015 Corton “Rognet” from Clos de la Chapelle is outstanding, offering up great purity to go with the depth, power and aging potential of the very best 2015s. Readers may recall that these fifty year-old vines lie just above those of Jean-Nicolas Méo on the slope in the heart of this *lieu à dit*, which lies alongside of Bressandes and Renardes. As deep as all of the top premier crus were here in 2015, there is an extra element of profundity evident in the Rognet, but one will have to be patient to enjoy this wine at its zenith. The very promising bouquet offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, roasted venison, dark chocolate, a superb base of soil, woodsmoke and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a rock solid core, impressive transparency, firm, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip and a very long, poised and youthfully complex finish. This is going to be a long-distance runner *par excellent*, but once it is ready to drink, it is going to be pure magic. 2028-2100. **94.**

2015 Corton “Bressandes”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The Bressandes from Domaine Clos de la Chapelle hails a twenty *ares* parcel of forty-five year-old vines. The 2015 Bressandes here is exceptional, offering up a deep, pure and nicely

reserved bouquet of dark berries, black cherries, bitter chocolate, gamebird, a beautifully refined base of soil tones, woodsmoke, a touch of fresh nutmeg, hints of coriander seed and a deft framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off stunning mid-palate depth, with great purity to the perfectly ripe fruit, suave, fine-grained tannins, good acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very, very long, youthfully complex and beautifully balanced finish. This will be a great, great wine in the fullness of time. 2027-2100. **95+**.

Vins Blancs

2015 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2015 Beaune “Reversées” Blanc from Clos de la Chapelle is a lovely example of the vintage, with all of the early perfume and generous fruit one finds in the best white Burgundies from this vintage. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a mélange of pear, peach, spring flowers, a bit of butter, almond, chalky soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and succulent, with a good core, sound framing acids and a long, ripe and wide open finish. This is listed at 133.5 percent, but seems just a hint riper than this level and will be tastiest during the next four or five years. Good juice. 2017-2025. **89**.

2015 Pernand-Vergelesses “Sous Frétilles”- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

The 2015 Sous Frétilles from Clos de la Chapelle is a ripe, nicely balanced and flat out delicious bottle of white Burgundy, offering up a deep and juicy nose of pear, acacia blossoms, fresh almond, a touch of tangerine, chalky soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, bright and wide open in personality, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip, very good framing acids and a long, succulent and classy finish. I do not think this will make old bones, but for drinking over the next five years, it will be superb. 2017-2022. **91+**.

2015 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Clos de la Chapelle

Having vines on the Pernand side of the hill of Corton must have been an advantage in the hot summer of 2015, and the Clos de la Chapelle version in this vintage has turned out beautifully as a result. This is 13.5 percent alcohol in 2015 (all natural) and the wine is impeccably balanced and drinking with loads of personality out of the blocks. The superb bouquet wafts from the glass in a classic blend of pear, apple, a touch of iodine, stony soil tones, spring flowers, hazelnuts and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely broad-shouldered in style, with excellent concentration at the core, fine soil signature, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is very delicious in its wide open youth, but really could do with at least a couple of years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge. 2024-2030+. **93+**.

THE LOVELY 2016 VINTAGE FROM DOMAINE HUËT



The 2016 vintage in the Loire Valley was hardly ideal, as the spring frosts that afflicted so many winegrowing regions in France in late April certainly wreaked havoc in parts of the Loire as well. For Domaine Huët, they were somewhat lucky, as the frost damage in the last week of April was not as severe in Vouvray as it was across the river in Montlouis, but damage was still substantial and yields were adversely affected because of frost damage. May and early June were hardly a reprieve for *vignerons* trying to recover from the frost, as it rained very heavily on several occasions, pushing up mildew pressure in the vineyards and adding to the heavy workloads of producers trying to protect what was left of the crop out in the vines. Finally, the rain relented and dry weather settled over Vouvray towards the end of June, but as the summer went on, drought became a problem as the warm and dry weather pattern continued over the region and hydric stress became an issue in the backend of the summer, with some vines shutting down and needed maturation lagging in certain vineyards. 2016 was hardly an ideal growing season up to this point! The *fin de saison* was very good however, and in Vouvray, where the frost damage was not severe, yields were only down about ten percent from a typical crop and the overall quality was quite high. The 2016s from Domaine Huët have turned out very well indeed and are very close in quality to the excellent 2015s here, albeit very different stylistically. The 2015 vintage at the domaine was characterized by powerful and ripe wines,

with broad shoulders and plenty of botrytis at the sweeter upper levels. In contrast, 2016, probably because of the hydric stress period in mid-summer, are less concentrated in style than the 2015s, but with perhaps more inherent elegance as a result. The sweeter Moelleux bottlings seem to have been more a result of *passerillage* (the dehydration of the berries on the vines in the autumn sun), rather than from botrytis, and so have very different personalities than their more tropical and nobly-rotten counterparts from 2015. However, the domaine was able to make a nice selection of Première Trie bottlings that do have a nice glaze of botrytis. I have also included notes on the newly released 2015 Cuvée Constance at the tail end of this article, as well as the very rare 1993 version, which closed out our second François Cotat tasting in style. Overall, 2016 is a very fine vintage at Domaine Huët, with particularly strong wines at the Demi-Sec level, but really refined examples at each category of sweetness that augur well for their long-term cellaring. My gut feeling at this early stage is that the Sec bottlings from 2016 may not go through Vouvray's customary period of hibernation and may well drink very well from start to finish, but time will tell if this prognostication turns out to be correct. To my palate, the great benefit of the beautiful Indian Summer of 2016 in the Loire really begins to announce its presence from the Demi-Sec bottlings on up, and this is where the long-term cellar treasures from Domaine Huët will ultimately be found. Particularly at the Demi-Sec and Moelleux levels, 2016 is indeed a very, very fine vintage for this iconic estate.

2016 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Le Haut Lieu Sec from Domaine Huët is a pretty wine and much less powerful than the 2015 version. The wine offers up lovely youthful aromatics of quince, tart pineapple, chalky minerality, orange peel, lanolin, a whisper of the honeycomb to come with bottle age and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely detailed, with good, but not great depth at the core, sound acids and very nice length and grip on the nascently complex finish. I like the shape of this wine very much, which does not have quite as much in reserve as many recent vintages of this bottling, but which has plenty of complexity and really impeccable balance. It may well age like the 1988 vintage here. 2017-2045+. **90.**

2016 Vouvray “Le Mont” Sec- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët's 2016 Le Mont Sec is again, more understated in personality than the deeper 2015 version, but it is very impressively focused, soil-driven and inherently complex and will be a classic in the fullness of time. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of tangerine, sweet quince, gentle smokiness, lovely minerality, pineapple, just a touch of lanolin and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, sound framing acids, fine focus and grip and a long, soil-driven and energetic finish. There is already a lovely sense of secondary layers emerging on the backend here that augurs well for its future, but the acids are a touch on the low side and this wine is likely to drink very well from an early age and will most likely not go through an extended period of hibernation. 2017-2045+. **91+.**

2016 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Sec- Domaine Huët

As readers may recall from last year's article on the Loire, there was no 2015 Sec made from the Clos de Bourg vineyard, as the strength of the vintage was for sweeter styled wines and all of the fruit from the Clos de Bourg was reserved for these bottlings. The 2016 Sec from the Clos du Bourg is the deepest of these three Sec cuvées, but perhaps not quite as precise in profile as the lovely Le Mont Sec. The nose delivers a fine and youthful constellation of apple, quince, lemon, deep soil tones, citrus blossoms, a dollop of wet wool and a gentle topnote of pineapple.

On the palate the wine is deep, primary and shows impressive mid-palate concentration, with its full-bodied format nicely balanced and focused. There is fine detail here, but the wine is still very youthful and has not yet really begun to show its inherent complexity on either the nose or the palate, and it is very, very long on the backend, which augurs so well for its future development. The 2016 Clos du Bourg Sec needs time to really come into its own, but this seems likely to ultimately be the top Sec bottling this year from Domaine Huët. 2020-2050. **92+**.

2016 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec is outstanding from Domaine Huët, as the year’s beautiful Indian Summer has given this wine an extra dimension that is not evident in any of the three Sec bottlings. The bouquet offers up a nascently complex mix of peach, sweet quince, bee pollen, chalky soil tones, white cherries and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full, pure and offers up outstanding elegance and complexity, with a fine core of fruit, excellent transparency, zesty acids and fine focus and grip on the very long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is going to be a very, very special vintage of Le Haut Lieu Demi-Sec. The wine is already delicious, but this is only the tip of the iceberg and one really should tuck this away for at least another five or six years and allow the complexity under the surface to rise up! 2022-2075. **93+**.

2016 Vouvray “Le Mont” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Le Mont Demi-Sec from Domaine Huët is an excellent wine in the making, but this is more adolescent in personality than the Le Haut Lieu version and will demand some cellaring time before it starts to hit on all cylinders. The nose reluctantly offers up scents of pear, pineapple, wet stone minerality, orange blossoms, just a hint of lanolin, incipient honeycomb and an exotic topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and reserved in profile, with outstanding mid-palate intensity, bright acids, fine focus and grip and a very, very long, soil-driven and primary finish. While this wine is not showing a whole lot of secondary components today, one can sense them waiting in the wings and all this beautiful wine will need is time in the cellar to blossom magically into a great bottle of demi-sec. Again, the elegance to come here is manifest and very, very promising! 2024-2075+. **93+**.

2016 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Demi-Sec- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Demi-Sec from the Clos du Bourg is a stunning wine in the making, with a great synthesis of depth, transparency and refined elegance. The bouquet is superb in its youthfully complex mélange of sweet quince, pineapple, chalky minerality, a touch of bee pollen, white lilies, citrus zest and a dollop of paraffin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, great soil inflection, bright acids and impeccable focus and grip on the very long, balanced and properly youthful finish. Great juice. 2024-2075+. **94+**.

2016 Vouvray “Le Haut Lieu” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Le Haut Lieu Moelleux from Domaine Huët is excellent, as it shows off the same degree of elegance as the Sec and Demi-Sec versions, but with greater depth and vibrancy. The nose jumps from the glass in a complex and very floral blend of quince, pear, honeycomb, iris blossoms, lovely soil tones, a hint of orange peel, lavender and apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, bright acids and outstanding balance on the long and classy finish. This is concentrated from *passerillage*, rather than botrytis, and wines of this style age in exemplary fashion. This is very,

very easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and deserves some extended time in the cellar to really blossom. 2022-2075+. **94.**

2016 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux from Domaine Huët is another lovely wine that does not achieve its concentration from botrytis (as was the case with this bottling in 2015), but rather, from desiccated grapes on the vine. The nose delivers here a very refined and youthful mélange of quince, tangerine, chalky minerality, a touch of lanolin, incipient honeycomb, citrus blossoms and a nice touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a great core, bright acids, excellent focus and grip and a very long, pure and promising finish. This is more primary than the Le Haut Lieu Moelleux and (hopefully) will be a bit easier to keep one’s hands off of while it cellars! Great juice in the making. 2023-2075+. **94+.**

2016 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Clos du Bourg Moelleux from Domaine Huët is an exceptional young wine in the making, with a depth and intensity that is almost a match for the 2015 Première Trie version, but without the same heavy influence of botrytis. The bouquet is deep, primary and stunning, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, pineapple, sweet quince, honeycomb, chalky soil, spring flowers and orange peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with great depth at the core, laser-like focus, beautiful soil signature and a very, very long, nascently complex and energetic finish. This is a puppy and will demand some extended hibernation to start to show all of its layers of complexity, but when it is ready for the primetime, it will be legendary juice! 2025-0275+. **95.**

2016 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Vouvray “Le Mont” Moelleux Première Trie from Domaine Huët is a beautiful wine in the making, with marvelous complexity and honeyed purity evident on both the nose and palate. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautifully glazed blend of sweet quince, guava, pineapple, honeycomb, orange zest, a touch of chalky soil and a topnote of citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, zesty and beautifully balanced, with a deeper-pitched profile than the regular Moelleux from botrytis, lovely framing acids, a fine core and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This does not have the concentrated acidity of some highly glazed vintages, but the structure here is just fine for carrying the wine fifty or sixty years down the road. Lovely juice. 2017-2075. **93+.**

2016 Vouvray “Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Première Trie- Domaine Huët

The 2016 Clos du Bourg” Moelleux Première Trie from Domaine Huët is a step up from the Le Mont version this year, as the botrytis here seems more complete to my palate. This is really a beautiful wine in the making, offering up a deeper, but more primary bouquet than the Le Mont above, with a tapestry of honey, pineapple, tangerine, lovely soil tones, a touch of lavender, orange blossoms and even a hint of youthful lanolin wafting from the glass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with a marvelous core, zesty acids and great focus and grip on the very long, nascently complex and vibrant finish. If thirty-odd years of drinking German wines has taught me anything about botrytis, the quality of the noble rot in the Clos du Bourg in 2016 was even better than that in Le Mont! This is a great wine in the making, but unlike the Le Mont Première Trie, it is not as ready to go out of the blocks and I would opt for cellaring this beautiful wine for at least a handful of years before starting to have at it in earnest. 2023-2100. **95+.**



2015 Vouvray “Cuvée Constance”- Domaine Huët (half bottle)

I have been looking forward to the release of Domaine Huët’s 2015 Cuvée Constance ever since I tasted a year ago the rest of the stunning range of wines produced here in the vintage. It is a great vintage for Domaine Huët and the Cuvée Constance is everything one could hope for from the confluence of this great estate and a legendary vintage. The wine is still very youthful, but its ultimate brilliance is very easy to see, as the wine wafts from the glass in a celestial constellation of orange, fresh apricot, incipient tea leaves, a nice touch of soil, hints of lanolin, orange peel, barley sugar and a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full and nascently complex, with laser-like focus, a bottomless core, great acids and marvelous balance on the very, very long, zesty and energetic finish. This is still a very young wine and will need years to start to show its secondary and tertiary layers of complexity, but they are lurking here and in the fullness of time, this will be breathtaking in its beauty. 2025-2100+. **97+**.

1993 Vouvray “Cuvée Constance”- Domaine Huët

Domaine Huët’s 1993 Cuvée Constance is reported to be one of the rarest wines ever released from the estate, as it was allegedly only offered to the market in the United Kingdom, after which Gaston Huët and Noël Pinguet had second thoughts about its “worthiness” as a Cuvée Constance bottling and it was sold elsewhere as a Moelleux Première Trie bottling (which might make it one of the legendary Première Tries in the domaine’s history!). At age twenty-four, the wine is now entering a gorgeous stage of peak drinkability, wafting from the glass in a very complex blend of dried apricot, orange peel, tea leaves, browned butter, chalky soil tones

and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very racy, with a marvelous core of fruit, great focus and grip and a very, very long, vibrant finish. This is a great wine, and despite it not being the richest vintage ever of Cuvée Constance, it is utterly brilliant. 2017-2060+. **96.**

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THE SUMMER OF 2017 CHAMPAGNE REPORT



Côte de Bars vineyards, on their Kimmeridgian limestone foundation, belonging to Robert Barbichon et Fils.

As is typical with the voluminous Champagne features that I write twice each year for the newsletter, this article was a big undertaking, as the sheer number of bottlings of Champagne that one finds in the market these days is pretty daunting. However, it is always a labor of love and I spend far more than two months in the preparation for each article, as I find that I cannot taste anywhere near the same number of bottles of sparkling wine in a single session as I can still wines, as the bubbles simply fatigue my palate at a faster rate. Rather than trying to rush through samples and taste the wines when I am already fading from previous tasting, I try to keep (whenever possible) the number of bottles of sparkling wines tasted on any given day to under fifteen wines, so that I can stay fresh and interested in the wines, rather than just try to slog through them to make deadlines. This seems to me to be the better approach to these wines, as each winemaker has spent a year of his life growing the grapes, vinifying and then settling on the blends for each individual wine, prior to tucking them in the cellars to age *sur latte* for anywhere from eighteen months to a dozen years. It seems only respectful to take a bit more time with the preparation of this article, given all of the time that each house and their *vigneron* have invested in each and every cuvée. As I do these reports twice a year, I do not try to get every producer I love from the region into each article, but am content to spread them out over the course of the

two articles, so if you do not see some of your favorite houses listed in the fifty-plus pages that follow, it simply means that once my mountain of samples had grown beyond what I could handle by the targeted deadline, I stopped soliciting bottles and was content to hold off on some estates' wines until the next iteration of this report is in the works. I started organizing samples in early March for this report, as it often takes some time for importers to get the samples sent out, and I am always pleased if the bottles arrive sooner than later and I can start to chip away at the samples while still working on the articles for the previous issue of the newsletter that is sent out before this one.

Given the sheer number of small producers who are currently making outstanding wines in the Champagne region, many of which are finding more representation in the export markets and finding their way to New York, I try to focus mostly on the Champagne region for this report, so that some of the other very fine sparkling wines from other areas of the globe do not get a lot of coverage in these two articles. I am often content to taste sparkling wines from other countries or regions and include their notes as part of articles on their still wines that appear over the course of the year, as it would simply be impossible to ever finish one of these features if all the high quality sparkling wines from outside of the Champagne region were also targeted for inclusion in this article. As it is, the new issue is already ten days late in being sent out, due to my not being able to finish my pile of Champagne samples in a timely manner. At least this summer feature on Champagne is a bit shorter than some of the previous editions, as my knee surgery in mid-March prohibited my being able to visit the region as part of my usual spring tasting tour. But, as the following pages will attest, even without spending a week or ten days in Champagne this past spring, there have been plenty of new bottlings to work through here in New York over the course of the spring and early summer.

In the notes that follow, one will find the very first arrivals of vintage-dated bottlings from the 2012 vintage. This is a very, very good year in Champagne and was most welcome by the *Champenois*, as 2011 was one of the most difficult vintages in recent memory in the region. In 2011, ripeness was a challenge to attain, the weather was basically miserable, and there were constant threats to the grapes throughout the growing season, with mildew and rot always lurking on the horizon and the sun was relatively scant for much of the summer. Despite the very serious challenges presented by 2011, chardonnay tended to be slightly favored over the red grapes, and careful selection also allowed for some nice pinot noir to be found scattered around the top villages in the region, so there are a handful of really good, vintage-dated 2011s in the market today and which totally transcend the overall quality of the growing season. A perfect example is the stunning 2011 les Crayères made by Benoît Marguet in Ambonnay, which is a profound young bottle from this great vineyard. So, do not ignore any 2011 vintage-dated bottles of bubbly simply on the overall poor reputation of the year, for if a talented producer has decided to release a 2011 vintage-dated wine, then it is probably safe to assume that they have made something pretty special through careful selection and favored vineyard sites. That said, as the 2012s filter into the market over the next year or two, they will be a welcome addition and no one in Champagne is going to mourn putting the 2011 vintage in the rearview mirror.

The 2012 growing season, on the surface, was not without its struggles (but was a huge step up from 2011), as 2012 had its share of challenges as well, including widespread frost damage in the spring, a wet early summer and some localized hail damage. However, the

weather turned sunny and warm in August and ripeness started to mount beautifully, coupled with lower yields from the earlier depredations, and the harvest in September took place under fine conditions. Yields are low in 2012, with some villages down as much as forty percent from a normal crop, but as yields are generally rather generous in general in Champagne, the resulting grapes came in with great intensity of flavor (rather than being overly concentrated, like some 2012 white Burgundies) and will make very memorable bottles when the vintage-dated wines start to find their way to merchants' lists in the coming years. There have already been some excellent non-vintage bottlings based on 2012 in the market over the last year or so, and more remain in the pipeline, so it is a good time to focus on those wines from producers who tend to age their non-vintage wines *sur latte* for a longer period in the cellars. Plenty of non-vintage wines have now kicked over to the 2013 base year, which is another fine year, with excellent acidity and very good ripeness, so many of the non-vintage wines from based on 2013 are just as appealing as those based on 2012, albeit, a bit different in size and shape from the style of the respective vintages.

Going a bit further back, the 2010 vintage was not a particularly strong year in the region, and probably gained a bit from how difficult the following growing season of 2011 was for *vignerons*, but there are some good wines to be found amongst the vintage-dated bottlings from 2010. That said, it is not a great year in Champagne and one needs to approach the 2010s on a wine by wine basis, but there are some really strong 2010s on the market right now and they will look like very good values in comparison to what 2012s are likely to be priced at down the road. I tasted several 2010s that I would be thrilled to have in my cellar for the long haul. The preceding year of 2009 was a "solar vintage" of heat and plentitude, with the vintage-dated Champagne bottlings from this year quite forward in style, loaded with fruit and often quite enjoyable to drink already. There are wines that are a bit heavy and fruit-driven in style, but there are others that have a great spine of minerality, very good acids for the medium-term and will be very enjoyable for drinking over the next decade or two. 2008 is a great, classic year for the cellar and the wines should be tucked away for further bottle aging- not because they are not drinkable now, as many are flat out delicious, but rather because the upside potential of this vintage is enormous and it makes sense to drink some of the other vintages in the market first and let the 2008s blossom into complete majesty with further cellaring. The 2007s are a more delicate year, but not without interest and they are starting to drink very nicely indeed and will continue to keep well in the cellar. The 2006s are more completely forward than either 2007 or 2008 and this is a good time to be drinking this vintage. The best wines will keep many more years in the cellar, but I am not sure that a top 2006 vintage-dated bottling from Champagne will not be more enjoyable in the ten to fifteen year drinking window than it will be at age twenty or twenty-five. The 2005s are a mixed lot, with some superb wines and some less satisfactory. The 2004s, which hailed from a huge crop based on the pent up energy stored in the vines from the torrid growing season of 2003 and its very short crop, so the wines of 2004 have plenty of cut and mineral drive, but only moderately ripe fruit aromatics and flavors. The wines tend more to the grapefruit, lemony side of the ledger in terms of fruit and can often have gently grassy or botanical overtones. I like this vintage a lot in its style, but recommend keeping the wines still in the cellar and let them fully blossom with extended aging, as they may well delight in much the same way as the 1988s in the fullness of time.

The following tasting notes are broken down by category, with non-Champagne Sparkling Wines list first, followed by Sec bottlings from Champagne. Then comes the Brut Nature and Extra Brut, non-vintage blended bottlings of Champagne, followed by non-vintage Blanc de Blancs (both Brut and Extra Brut wines grouped together here), and then non-vintage Brut bottlings. The last grouping of non-vintage bubbly are the Rosés. The sections round out with vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs wines, followed by vintage-dated Brut and Extra Brut and finally vintage-dated Rosés. Within each section, the wines are listed alphabetically by producer, and in the vintage-dated sections, they are also sorted chronologically from youngest vintage to oldest in each category, before being listed alphabetically. There is plenty to chew on in this report, as I tasted a huge number of truly superb wines in preparation for this report, so take your time working through it! In my next report, I will again put together a ranking of my favorite current small grower Champagne estates, as there have been a few new additions to the ranks of my very top-rated domaines in recent times, as well as a few producers who seem to have slipped a peg or two in recent years. There are so many exciting, quality-inspired changes going on in the world of Champagne today that these reports are necessarily long, as more and more important technical details are now being shared by many of the top small growers (sadly, most of the *Grandes Marques* have not followed the lead of folks like Krug, Louis Roederer and Bruno Paillard in providing background information on *cépages*, base year, disgorgement dates and *dosage* for their wines, but hopefully this will change in the years to come), so there is lots of pertinent information that needs to be included in the notes on each wine tasted. This is a golden age for Champagne and I hope that many readers are taking advantage of it and putting some of these beautiful wines away in their cellars to blossom with extended bottle age, as we have never seen such a volume of great wines being produced for the long haul in Champagne!

Sparkling Wines

Bertha “Cardús” Gran Reserva Brut Nature (Cava- Penedès) Disgorged October 2016

The Cardús Brut Nature Gran Reserva from Bertha is from the base year of 2011 and is made up of a classic blend of the “Big Three” of Macabeu, Xarel-lo and Parellada. The wine spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and offers up a superb bouquet of lemon, tart orange, sea salts, lovely, stony soil tones, a hint of fresh almond, dried flowers and a topnote of lemongrass. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with excellent balance, elegant *mousse* and a very long, focused and complex finish. This is really exceptional Cava that is drinking beautifully at age six, but has the balance to age another decade or two with distinction. Impressive! 2017-2032+. **92.**

Bruno Dangin “Blanche” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut NV Disgorged January 2017

As I mentioned last autumn, Bruno Dangin’s domaine lies only a kilometer outside of the appellation boundaries for Champagne, so for all intents and purposes, these are as much Aube Champagne bottlings as they are Crémant de Bourgogne! The Blanche bottling is a Blanc de Blancs made from chardonnay and the base year is 2013. As I wrote about Monsieur Dangin last year, his farming is certified organic, the wines are fermented with native yeasts and he ages each non-vintage cuvée fully three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The 2013 version of Blanche offers up a fine nose of apple, pear, toasted almond, chalky soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely focus and balance, slightly larger bubbles than ideal, but very nicely integrated acids and excellent length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really good juice and a stunning bargain! 2017-2025+. **88.**

Eudald Massana Noya “Reserva” Brut Nature Cava NV (Penedès)

The new release of Brut Nature Reserva from Eudald Massana Noya is composed of a blend of forty-nine percent Macabeu, twenty-one percent Xarel-lo, eighteen percent Parellada and twelve percent Chardonnay, with all of the grapes farmed organically. In many cases, I tend to prefer my Cava with only the big three indigenous grapes of the region, but the addition of chardonnay here is very well done and really adds depth and dimension to the wine. The bouquet is excellent, offering up scents of apple, bread fruit, gentle smokiness, salty minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is fine Cava. 2017-2027. **89+**.

Eudald Massana Noya “Brut Nature Familia” Cava NV (Penedès)

The new release of “Brut Nature Familia” from Eudald Massana Noya has a *cépages* of sixty percent Macabeu, thirty percent Xarel-lo and ten percent Parellada. Readers may recall that last year’s version was a Brut, but this year the wine has arrived in the states as a Brut Nature. The new release offers up a fine bouquet of apple, menthol, ocean breeze, dried flowers, salty soil tones and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with fine *mousse*, bright acids and excellent backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. Last year, the *dosage* was a touch overly generous to my palate, but this year, this is obviously not an issue and this is a lovey bottle of Cava. 2017-2027. **89**.

2015 Bruno Danguin “Prestige de Narcès” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Disg: April 2017

As I mentioned last October, the Prestige de Narcès cuvée from Bruno Danguin is his top wine and is a Blanc de Noirs made up entirely of pinot noir, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented for this wine, rather than raised in tank. Though this is the top of the line bottling here, it is not aged as long *sur latte* as the non-vintage cuvée. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The 2015 Prestige de Narcès is an excellent wine, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, white peach, chalky minerality, a touch of citrus zest and gentle notes of warm bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. No doubt the ripeness of the 2015 vintage has given this wine an early accessibility that is very attractive. Fine juice and another absolute steal for its price! 2017-2035. **90+**.

2014 Bruno Danguin “Prestige de Narcès” Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Disg: July 2016

This bottle of the 2014 Prestige de Narcès is a later disgorgement than the one I reported on last year. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of fresh lime, apple, warm bread, chalky minerality, fresh almond and a bit of smokiness starting to develop in the upper register. Oh the palate the wine is full, focused and more minerally in profile than the 2015 version, with a fine core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, bright, zesty acids and excellent focus and grip on the long and vibrant finish. This is showing even better than it did nine months ago! 2017-2035. **91**.

2012 Frank John Riesling Brut “32” (Germany)**Disgorged August 2016**

This sample found me by happenstance, so I do not know much of the background of this producer. The wine is entirely Riesling and was aged thirty-two months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is quite lovely, offering up scents of apple, tangerine, gentle leesy tones, fine minerality and a bit of fresh-baked bread in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and frothy, with good mid-palate depth, slightly coarse *mousse*, brisk acids and good focus and grip on the well-balanced and youthful finish. This is starting to drink nicely

at age five, but will be even better with another few years in the cellar. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **88.**

2012 Ultramarine Blanc de Noirs Brut (Sonoma Coast)

Disgorged November 2016

This was my first taste of a wine from Ultramarine, who has been trending in some wine circles in the last few years. I was hoping for a bit more, but my friend who brought it along mentioned that the Blanc de Blancs bottling he had purchased at the same time was a step up from this solid, grey flannel Blanc de Noirs. The bouquet, which is my favorite part of the wine, offers up a nice range of scents, including white cherries, apple, bread dough, soil tones and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, frothy and rather lacking in dimension and complexity, with bright acids and a rather alarmingly short finish. This is okay, but based on some of the buzz around Ultramarine, I was expecting quite a bit more. 2017-2025+. **86.**

2006 Ca del Bosco “Cuvée Annamaria Clementi” Brut NV (Franciacorta)

This was the first time I had ever tasted a vintage of the Ca del Bosco “Cuvée Annamaria Clementi” and I was quite impressed with its quality. The *cépages* here is fifty-five percent chardonnay, twenty-five percent pinot blanc and twenty percent pinot noir. The *vins clairs* are all barrel-fermented in older casks and undergo full malo, with the wines spending at least seven years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The finishing *dosage* is quite low, at around one gram per liter. The 2006 offers up a complex nose of white peach, tart orange, warm bread, caraway seed, stony soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and just a touch of youthful greenness still perking up the long finish. Good juice. 2017-2030. **91+.**

1998 Vouvray Brut- Domaine Huët

The 1998 Vouvray Brut from Domaine Huët is absolutely beautiful and is drinking in its sweet spot at age nineteen. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a vibrant blend of quince, apple bread dough, a hint of honeycomb, chalky soil and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully defined by its chalky soil signature, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and very classy finish. One of my favorite recent vintages of this iconic Loire bubbly. 2017-2040. **92+.**

Sec

Taittinger Nocturne Sec NV (Reims)

The new iteration of Taittinger Nocturne Sec non-vintage is the same blend as last year: forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and was finished with the same *dosage* as previous releases, 17.5 grams per liter. The wine ages four years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and offers up a deep and classy nose of peach, melon, chalky soil tones, brioche, musky floral tones redolent of honeysuckle and lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite zesty, with a good core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and fine interplay of minerality, acidity and residual sweetness on the long and vibrant finish. As has been the case since its first release, this is a really well done, sweeter-styled Champagne. 2017-2030+. **91.**

Taittinger Nocturne Rosé Sec NV (Reims)

As was the case last year, the Taittinger Nocturne Rosé Sec has a slightly different *cépages* than the non-Rosé version, with the blend here fifty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier. The *dosage* is the same 17.5 grams per liter. The new release of Nocturne Rosé delivers a fine bouquet of cherries, a touch of orange peel, rose

petals, woodsmoke, wheat toast and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and fairly brisk on the attack, with a good core, refined *mousse* and good length and grip on the gently sweet finish. I do not know why, but this year, I find that the residual sweetness on the backend is not quite as seamlessly integrated into the acids and minerality as was the case with this bottling last year, though this may just be a reflection of the youth of the wine and this may change as the wine has a chance to settle in a bit more. 2017-20130. **89+**.



Extra Brut and Brut Nature

Francis Boulard “Grande Montagne” Extra Brut NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disg: 3/16

The new release of Grande Montagne from Francis Boulard is from the base year of 2012, with thirty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines from 2011 and 2010. The *cépages* is sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay this year, with the *vins clairs* here all barrel-fermented with indigenous yeasts. The vineyards for this bottling all lie in the village of Mailly and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine and complex bouquet of green apple, bread dough, chalky soil tones, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully snappy, with an excellent core, refined *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is a superb bottle of bubbly that will age well, but is already quite tasty. 2017-2030+.

92.

Francis Boulard “Les Murgiers” Extra Brut NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disgorged 9/16

The new release of les Murgiers from Francis Boulard is from the base year of 2013, with thirty percent of the cuvée made up of reserve wines from 2012, 2011 and 2010. The wine is a blend of sixty-five percent pinot meunier, twenty-five percent pinot noir and ten percent chardonnay. The wine delivers fine promise on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, a touch of raspberry, bread dough, fine soil tones, dried flowers, just a bit of youthful smokiness and a lovely mix of delicate spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and still fairly primary finish. This is already tasty, but as the wine below demonstrates, this will be even better with a bit of bottle age! 2019-2033+. **91+**.

Francis Boulard “Les Murgiers” Extra Brut NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disgorged 4/15

One of the two current releases of Francis Boulard’s “Les Murgiers” Extra Brut is an older base year than the one I tasted last fall, as this wine hails from the base year of 2007 and is a blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier, rather than the one hundred meunier cuvée from last October. It was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine shows beautiful secondary development on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, fresh-baked bread, a gorgeous base of soil tones, just a hint of honey, smoky overtones and a whisper of toasted almond in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and at its peak of drinkability, with a superb core, lovely mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the focused and still plenty zesty finish. This is a beautiful wine. 2017-2030. **93**.

Champagne La Closerie “Les Beguines” Extra Brut LC14- Jérôme Prévost (Gueux)

The new release of La Closerie “Les Beguines” from Jérôme Prévost hails from the base year of 2014 and is another simply outstanding wine in the making. This is one hundred percent pinot meunier and offers up a gorgeous, youthful bouquet of white peach, apple, superbly complex minerality, gentle smokiness and those lovely, telltale meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a lovely core, refined *mousse* and a very long, nascently complex and racy finish. The balance here is impeccable, but this is a young wine that really deserves some time in the cellar to fully blossom from behind its lovely structural chassis. 2021-2050. **94**.

Champagne Corbon “Absolument Brut” NV (Avize)

Disgorged February 2014

The current release of Absolument Brut from Agnès Corbon is from the base year of 2007, with fifty percent of the blend comprised of reserve wines from a combination of 2005 and 2006. This was an earlier release than the last example I reported on of this bottling, but from the same base year. The blend is fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and the wine saw zero *dosage* after its six-plus years on the fine lees. The wine offers up a fine nose of pear, apple, fresh almond, limestone soil tones, warm bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a lovely core, excellent complexity and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very long, focused and perfectly balanced finish. This has now had three and a half years of bottle age since its disgorgement and is really starting to blossom and show off its secondary layers of complexity. 2017-2035+. **92**.

Henri Giraud “Esprit Nature” Grand Cru Brut Nature NV (Aÿ)

The new release of the Henri Giraud “Esprit Nature” is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. Fifty percent of the blend is made up of reserve wines, which are aged in cask. The wine’s bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of white peach, apple, *patissière*, lovely soil tones, gentle smokiness and a nice whisper of vanillin oak in

the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and just a touch of oak adding richness on the long and complex finish. The wine handles its lack of *dosage* beautifully, with no signs of bitterness or overly sharp acids. Superb Brut Nature. 2017-2030. **92.**

Godmé Père et Fils Extra Brut NV (Verzenay) Current Release

The new release of the non-vintage bottling of Godmé Père et Fils Extra Brut is a lovely wine in the making, but as this was drunk in Europe, I do not have a date of disgorgement. The wine offers up a lovely and quite red fruity nose of white peaches, apple, smoky overtones, lovely minerality, a touch of vanillin oak and a fine topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and carries its touch of new oakiness to the palate, with a rock solid core, fine soil inflection, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This will age very nicely and I would expect that the perception of oakiness will diminish with bottle age, but right now, it marks the wine a touch more than I like. 2019-2035. **91+.**

Godmé Père et Fils Extra Brut NV (Verzenay) 2010 Release

This superb bottle came out of my friend's cellar and was absolutely singing when we shared the bottle to start out a recent Bordeaux tasting. The bouquet has blossomed into a beautiful apogee of apple, pear, a complex base of soil tones, lemon curd and a refined topnote of smoky pinot noir elements. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a rock solid core, superb transparency, elegant *mousse* and a very long, classy and *à point* finish. This is really in its sweet spot right now, but will continue to cruise along for at least another dozen years. Delicious bubbly. 2017-2030. **93.**

Champagne Grongnet "Carpe Diem" Extra Brut NV (Étoges) Disgorged May 2015

Cécile Grongnet's Carpe Diem bottling is a blend of seventy percent chardonnay and fifteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and does not undergo malo. This is still from the base year of 2008 (the 2009 will be shipping in a month or so) and has a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine is aged under cork, rather than crown cap during the five-plus years it spent *sur latte*, so it is an oxidative style. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of white peach, apple, hazelnut, chalky minerality, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a rock solid core, brisk acids, laser-like focus, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. This is still a youthful wine structurally and will continue to improve with extended cellaring. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035+. **92+.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 739 Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged June 2016

The Jacquesson Cuvée 739 Extra Brut is from the base year of 2011, with nearly a third of the blend composed of reserve wines this year. The *cépages* is fifty-seven percent chardonnay, twenty-two percent pinot meunier and twenty-one percent pinot noir, with all of the *vins clairs* having been barrel-fermented and the finishing *dosage* the customary 3.5 grams per liter for this cuvée. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality, beautiful meunier-derived floral tones and a nice touch of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, very nicely balanced finish. This bottling is already quite tasty, but like all of the Jacquesson wines, this is built to age and will be even better three to five years down the road. A really strong result for a base year 2011 wine. 2017-2035+. **91+.**

Jacquesson Cuvée 735 “Dégorgement Tardif” Extra Brut NV (Dizy) Disgorged Nov. 2015

Jacquesson’s Cuvée 735 “Dégorgement Tardif” is from the base year of 2007 and spent more than seven years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine’s *cépages* is forty-seven percent chardonnay, thirty-three percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier and the *dosage* was 3.5 grams per liter. The wine has developed beautifully on its fine lees and offers up a pure and complex bouquet of apple, pear, a hint of nutmeg, brioche, beautiful soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a fine girdle of acidity, a rock solid core, superb soil signature, frothy *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is terrific wine and I love the combination of secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate, coupled to a youthful chassis of acidity. This is drinking with great style today, but will also age for many years to come. 2017-2035. **93.**

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

The current release of Lamiable “Grand Cru” non-vintage Extra Brut is made of a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* undergoing full malo and the wine spending two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is lovely, offering up scents of white peach, apple, a fine base of soil, warm bread and an incipient hint of the nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and good, but not great length on the complex finish. I like this quite well, but would love to see the house stretch out the *elevage* just a bit longer on its fine lees and allow the wine to really develop, as the raw materials here are very fine indeed and there may just be another level of quality waiting in the wings here. That said, this is still a very tasty example of Extra Brut and it is only the slight lack of length that keeps its score down. 2017-2030. **89.**

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature NV (Cumières) Disg: December 2016

The new release of Cumières Brut Nature from Vincent Laval is from the base year of 2014 and is a blend of forty percent chardonnay and thirty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. Due to Vincent’s growing popularity in the market, this wine no longer sees quite the same length of time aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, as thirsty clients keep demanding it earlier and earlier from the domaine’s cellars. Consequently, it does not drink quite as well as it did upon release four or five years ago, as it simply does not spend as much time on its fine lees before being sent out into the world. That noted, the 2014 version is a very, very good wine that will be even better with further bottle age, as it offers up a lovely nose of white peach, apple, a fine base of soil, *patissière* and a meunier floral topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and vibrant, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, superb mineral drive on the backend and fine cut and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. Good juice that will only improve with some extended bottle age. 2020-2040+. **91+.**

Le Brun Servenay “Extra Brut Réserve” NV (Avize)

The Le Brun Servenay “Extra Brut Réserve” is one of the few wines from the Avize domaine that is not entirely chardonnay, as the *cépages* for this bottling is fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. Like all of the house’s wines, the *vins clairs* here do not undergo malolactic. The new release offers up a fine bouquet of pear, apple, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and a long, zesty finish. Though the *dosage* is low here, the acids are nicely buried in the body of the wine and it is already drinking very well indeed. 2017-2030. **90.**



Champagne Lombard “Premier Cru” Extra Brut NV (Épernay) Disgorged March 2017

The new release of Champagne Lombard’s non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2009 and is a blend of forty percent chardonnay and a sixty percent combination of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, a touch of nectarine, lovely soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, very good soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, focused and well-balanced finish. The extended aging *sur latte* has given this wine a lovely layer of secondary complexity and the wine is drinking very well today. 2017-2030. **90+**.

Champagne Lombard “Blanc de Noirs” Extra Brut NV (Épernay) Disgorged July 2016

The current release of Lombard “Blanc de Noirs” Extra Brut is from the base year of 2012 and is composed entirely of pinot noir. The wine spent more than three years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of white peach, *patissière*, a fine base of soil tones, dried flowers and a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, slightly coarse *mousse*, brisk acids and fine focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This needs just a bit more bottle age to round into prime drinking mode, but it has depth and dimension on both the nose and palate and will be very tasty when it fully blossoms. 2018-2030. **90**.

Champagne Lombard “Grand Cru Verzenay” Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg: June 2016

Lombard’s Verzenay bottling is a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay and is from the base year of 2012. I love everything about this wine except its length, as the wine does tail off rather briskly on the finish, despite all the other elements beautifully presented and quite serious. The quite complex bouquet is a refined blend of white peach, apple, *patissière*, steely minerality, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, focused and full-bodied, with fine depth in the mid-palate, frothy *mousse* and fine balance on the moderately short finish. This was served right after Lombard’s Mesnil-sur-Oger bottling and the different in backend length was rather dramatic, and I wonder if on its own I might have given it more of the benefit of the doubt in this regard. It is still a very tasty bottle, but a bit more length on the finish would have made it outstanding. 2017-2035. **89.**

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

Readers may recall that the non-vintage Extra Brut bottling from Benoît Marguet was called “Elements” in its 2010 and 2011 iterations, but one of the huge Cava producers in Catalunya had a copyright on this term for one of their wines and threatened suit if Benoît did not change the name. To my mind, they missed a golden opportunity to have one of their wines associated in the market with Champagne Marguet! In any case, the “Shaman 12” bottling is still the non-vintage Marguet wine in the market, as the 2013 version is just about to ship from Ambonnay to the states. The wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and includes fifteen percent reserve wine from the solera started in 2010. The wine offers up a simply beautiful nose of white peach, a touch of red fruit, a very complex base of soil, *patissière* and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, fine focus and soil signature, elegant *mousse* and outstanding cut and grip on the very long and polished finish. Great non-vintage bubbly! 2017-2035. **92+.**

Champagne Marie-Courtin “Résonance” Extra Brut NV (Polisot) Disgorged June 2016

The Résonance bottling from Dominique Moreau is composed entirely of pinot noir, with the most recent release hailing from the base year of 2013. The wine offers up a fine and still quite youthful nose of apple, tart orange, sourdough bread, lovely minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, low fat and racy, with a full-bodied format, brisk acids, frothy *mousse* and very good backend mineral drive on the long and snappy finish. This is very low *dosage* and could do with a bit of time in the cellar to allow the structure to soften up a bit, but it should age nicely and is a fine bottle in the making. 2019-2030. **91.**

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

This version is from the base year of 2012 and was still pretty tight when I tasted it a year ago, but has blossomed nicely with another year in bottle. This is a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay, with thirty-five percent of the cuvée being composed of reserve wines from 2011, 2010 and 2009. The *dosage* is three grams per liter. With a bit of bottle age, the bouquet has blossomed beautifully, wafting from the glass in a classy blend of lemon, tangerine, superb minerality, bread dough, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with refined *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. This will continue to age for years to come, but it is starting to drink with great personality. 2017-2035.. **91+.**

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Ascendant” Extra Brut Réserve NV (Verzy) Disg: Nov. 2016

L’Ascendant is a new cuvée from Sébastien Mouzon, which is produced from a solera that he began in 2010, made essentially from the same raw materials that go into his l’Atavique bottling, with the exception that all of the *vins clairs* destined for the solera are barrel-fermented. The blend is sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and the wine was finished with the customary *dosage* here of three grams per liter. The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a refined and vibrant constellation of blood orange, apple, complex soil tones, warm biscuits, smoke and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and cut, very elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the seamless and utterly complete finish. A fine, fine new addition to the lineup at Mouzon-Leroux! 2017-2040+. **93+**.

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

Sébastien Mouzon’s current release of his Blanc de Noirs bottling of l’Ineffable is the same as the one I reviewed last summer, from the base year of 2011 (with fifteen percent of the cuvée from 2010). Fifty percent of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented for this wine and the *dosage* is listed on the back label as one-half gram per liter. The additional year of bottle age has allowed the wine to continue to open up, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, *patissière*, complex soil tones, warm bread, dried flowers and a nice touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and impressively light on its feet, with impressive focus and grip, a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, refined and classy finish. First class juice. 2017-2040. **93**.

Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut NV (Reims) Disgorged June 2016

The current release of Bruno Paillard “Première Cuvée” Extra Brut was aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, making this base year 2012. The wine wafts from the glass in a lovely, youthful aromatic constellation of apple, pear, chalky minerality, warm biscuits and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent *mousse*, lovely balance and outstanding mineral drive on the long and still quite primary finish. This is approachable today, but is really built for the long haul and will be dramatically more generous on the palate with a few years’ worth of bottle age. Fine, fine juice in the making! 2020-2050. **93**.

Ployez-Jacquemart “Zéro Dosage” Brut Nature NV (Ludes)

Ployez-Jacquemart’s Zéro Dosage non-vintage Brut Nature bottling is another new addition in the *maison’s* lineup, with the current release made up of a *cépages* of fifty-two percent chardonnay and twenty-four percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is from the base year of 2006 and is starting to show some lovely secondary layers of complexity in its refined bouquet of apple, warm biscuits, complex soil tones, dried flowers and a gentle touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced (particularly for a non-*dosé* wine), with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a very long, seamless and zesty finish. This is high class juice. 2017-2030. **92**.

Ployez-Jacquemart “Passion” Extra Brut NV (Ludes)

Ployez-Jacquemart’s Extra Brut bottling of Passion is composed of a blend of forty-four percent pinot noir, thirty-eight percent chardonnay and eighteen percent pinot meunier, with one-third of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented (these wines do not undergo malo) and the other two-thirds raised in tanks. A quarter of each blend is reserve wines and the bottling spends four years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The new release of Passion offers up a complex nose of apple, *patissière*, complex soil tones, smoke, warm biscuits and dollop of white flowers in the

upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with brisk acids, elegant *mousse*, fine mineral drive, just a touch of oak influence and a very long, focused finish. This is really superb bubbly, with real mid-palate depth and great energy on the finish. 2017-2035+. **93.**

Ponson “la Petite Montagne” Extra Brut NV (Coulommès la Montagne) Disg: Jan. 2016

The new release of “la Petite Montagne” non-vintage Extra Brut bottling from Maxime Ponson is composed of a blend of thirty-two percent chardonnay, forty-five percent pinot meunier and twenty-three percent pinot noir. It is from the base year of 2011 and spent four years aging *sur latte* prior to being finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine is fermented solely with indigenous yeasts in stainless steel, with the *vins clairs* going through full malo, though future releases will also incorporate a bit of barrel fermentation into the cellar regimen. The bouquet on the current release is quite stylish, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, *patissière*, lovely soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a topnote of meunier floral tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a good core, bright acids, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is good juice and augurs very well for future developments here. 2017-2030+. **91.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “les Solistes” Extra Brut NV (Pierry) Disgorged March 2016

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “les Solistes” Extra Brut NV bottling is also a single *cépages*, single vineyard wine, based on pinot meunier from the vineyard of Les Gouttes d’Or in Pierry. Jean-Marc barrel ferments half of the blend, with the other half raised in cement eggs, prior to aging three years *sur latte* and a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. This is base year 2012. The wine is exceptional this year, with the nose soaring from the glass in a refined blend of white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, a gardenful of meunier floral tones and just a touch of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and brisk, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, poised and youthful finish. At this low *dosage*, this wine is still a bit too young for primetime drinking (at least to my palate), but is going to be stellar with just a bit of time to relax structurally. 2019-2035+. **92.**

Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Disgorged February 2016

The current bottling of Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Brut Nature in the market is from the base year of 2008 and spent nearly seven years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine’s *cépages* is one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, and like almost all of the Tarlant wines, the *vins clairs* are fermented in a combination of older Burgundy casks and stainless steel and do not go through malo. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a sophisticated mix of apple, lemon, bread dough, complex chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and seamless, with perfect balance, a fine core, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the very pure and very classy finish. What I love about Benoit and Mélanie Tarlant’s non-*dosé* bottlings is that they give the wines sufficient time in the cellars for the acids to soften prior to releasing the wines, so there is none of the sharp edges that show in so many other non-*dosé* bottlings from other growers. This is truly high class juice! 2017-2035. **92.**

Champagne Tarlant “BAM!” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Disgorged April 2016

The “BAM!” cuvée is named from an acronym of its *cépages*, as it is made from a blend of sixty-eight percent Petit Meslier and equal parts of Pinot Blanc and Arbanne. The current release is half 2009 base year and half a blend of 2008 and 2007. The *vins clairs* here do not go through malo, but are barrel-fermented spend eight months aging in cask after fermentation,

prior to bottling. The wine spent nearly six years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, peach, bread dough, chalky soil tones, a hint of fresh nutmeg and lovely, gently musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and precise, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a very long, snappy and well-balanced finish. Without malo or buffering *dosage*, this is still a young wine and will be even better with a few years in the cellar, but it is already really very easy to drink in its youth. 2019-2035+. **92.**

Champagne Tarlant “Cuvée Louis” Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly) Disgorged September 2016

The new release of Cuvée Louis from the Tarlant family is from the base year of 2000, with the fifteen percent of reserve wines for this bottling hailing from the vintages of 1999, 1998, 1997 and 1996. As is customary with the Cuvée Louis, the wine spent fully fifteen years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and is non-*dosé*. As readers may recall, the wine is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, from the *lieu à dit* of “Les Crayons” in Oeuilly that was planted back in 1946. Like all of the Tarlant wines, the *vins clairs* do not go through malo. The wine is barrel-fermented in four year-old casks and aged until May of 2001 in cask prior to blending and bottling. The 2000 Cuvée Louis offers up a deep, vibrant and complex bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, refined soil tones, a touch of hazelnut, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a great core, superb balance, elegant *mousse* and a long, brisk and very nicely balanced finish. At age seventeen, the new release of Cuvée Louis is drinking with great class, but it has the capacity to evolve in bottle for decades to come. Great juice! 2017-2040+. **94+.**

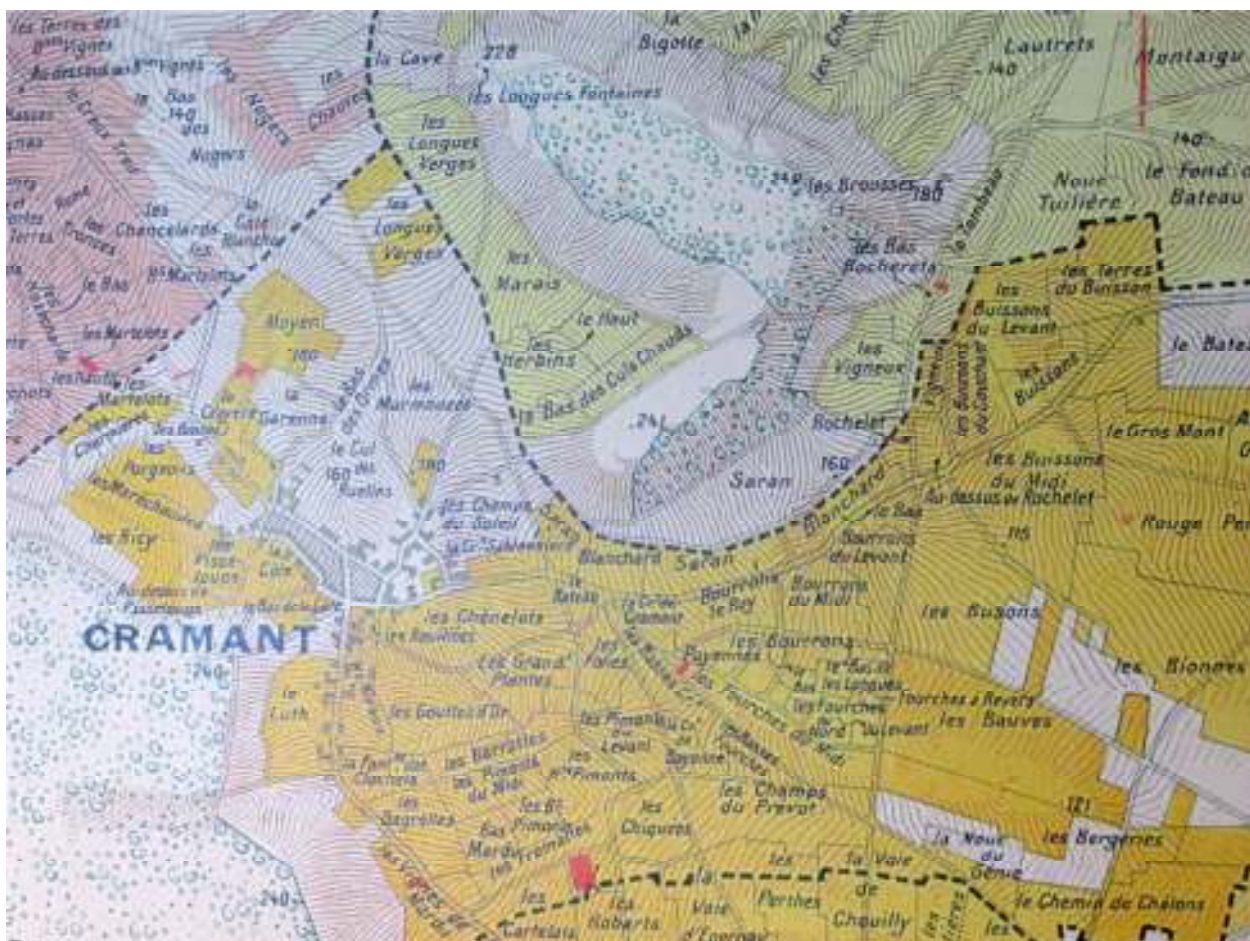
Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut

Francis Boulard “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Nature NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disg: 12/12

The current release of Francis Boulard “Blanc de Blancs” Brut Nature takes a different approach to aging the wine, with a fairly brisk disgorgement (this is from the base year of 2010), followed by extended bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The wine is showing lovely precision on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, tangerine, fresh-baked bread, a touch of nutmeg and a fine base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and racy, with good mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse* and good, but not great length on the focused finish. This is very tasty, but I get the sense that just a touch of *dosage* (only a couple of grams?) might have been an improvement in balance over non-*dosé*. This is still quite good, but there are other bottlings from Monsieur Boulard that I liked better this time around. 2017-2027+? **88.**

Francis Boulard “Les Rachais” Brut Nature NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disgorged 6/14

The les Rachais bottling from Francis Boulard is a one hundred percent chardonnay cuvée, though it is not listed as a Blanc de Blancs on the label. The wine is from the base year of 2009 and offers up a fine, complex nose of pear, toast, orange peel, stony minerality and a touch of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still brisk, with a good core, fine focus and a long, snappy and slightly severe finish. Without any *dosage*, there is nothing to buffer the wine’s considerable acidity right now and it is in need of some bottle age to soften up the backend acids. For the moment, this is really only a wine for non-*dosé* purists, but with a bit of bottle age, it should relax a bit more structurally and be more of a crowd pleaser. The raw materials here are outstanding and I would have loved to have seen just a couple of grams of *dosage* to better balance the wine in its youth. But, the score could easily move up with some bottle age. 2017-2030+. **88.**



Jacques Defrance “Native” Soléra Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (les Riceys)

The Jacques Defrance “Native” Soléra Brut Blanc de Blancs is a new bottling to me, as the house only began their solera with the 2009 vintage. This is one hundred percent chardonnay, where the *vins clairs* are aged for one year in older Burgundy barrels prior to being assembled with the solera in stainless steel tanks for holding. Once bottled, the wine is aged three years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, brioche, stony minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with an excellent core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty and beautifully balanced finish. This is a terrific new bottling from this superb estate in the Aube. 2017-2030+. **92.**

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

Philippe Gonet’s non-vintage Blanc de Blancs “Signature” Brut is aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The current release offers up a classic nose of pear, apple, pastry cream, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and zesty, with good, but not great depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, sound acids and good length and grip on the easy-going finish. This is perfectly quaffable and well done in its idiom, but it is not overly ambitious. 2017-2027. **88.**

Gosset “Grand Blanc de Blancs” NV (Épernay)

This is the current bottling of Gosset “Grand Blanc de Blancs” in the market and it is excellent, being the same cuvée I reported on last summer. This is a blend of 2010 and 2009

wines, with the bottling having aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and it was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The additional year of bottle age has allowed the wine to really open up nicely, offering a fine bouquet of pear, lemon, bread dough, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids (from no malo) and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced and complex finish. This is a first class bottle of Blanc de Blancs that is just starting to really blossom and which will continue to drink well for decades to come. 2017-2035. **92+**.

Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges)

Disgorged February 2016

The new release of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Cécile Grongnet is from the base year of 2012. As is customary with this cuvée, two-thirds of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented, with the other third raised in stainless steel and the *dosage* is eight grams per liter. I tasted two different disgorgement dates of this bottling, with the February 2016 version offering up a superb bouquet of pear, apple, toasted almonds, chalky soil tones, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the long, zesty, complex and very well-balanced finish. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **92**.

Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges)

Disgorged July 2016

This is the same wine as the above, from the base year of 2012, but it was disgorged five months later and will be the current bottling in the market over the coming year. The wine is a touch more vibrant on the nose, albeit, a touch less complex at the present time, offering up scents of pear, apple, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, brioche, smoke and a hint of lime blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and far racier than the above, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the youthful and complex finish. This too is excellent, but the earlier disgorgement date is the better drink today and I would opt for tucking this wine away in the cellar for six months and letting it catch up with the earlier disgorgement, as it is pretty racy fare today. 2018-2035. **92**.

Laherte Frères Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Chavot)

Disgorged July 2016

The current release of Laherte Frères Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature is from the base year of 2012, which makes up fifty percent of the blend, with the rest comprised of reserve wines from the previous year, which are kept in cask, rather than stainless steel tank prior to blending. All of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and aged for seven months prior to bottling in the spring following the harvest. The bouquet is excellent, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, fresh almond, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and complexity and a long, zesty and refined finish. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035. **92**.

David Léclapart “l’Artiste” Blanc de Blancs “L.V10” Pas Dosé NV (Trépail)

David Léclapart’s current release of l’Artiste” hails from the 2010 vintage and is a superb example of young Blanc de Blancs. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a refined mix of pear, delicious apple, *crème patissière*, gentle nuttiness, a complex base of chalky minerality, apple blossoms, a whisper of buttery oak and incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, brisk and rock solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus and a very long, nascently complex and snappy finish. The balance here is impeccable, but this is still a young wine and without any *dosage*, bottle age is going to be needed to soften up some of the sharp edges. It will be brilliant in good measure, but exercise a bit of patience! 2020-2045. **93**.

Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Cramant) Disgorged July 2016

The newest release of Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” non-vintage Brut, was disgorged in June of 2016 and is composed of fifty percent base year 2013 and fifty percent reserve wines from the previous harvest. This bottling is produced from fruit from the grand cru villages of Cramant, Chouilly and Oiry and was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is pure and nascently complex, delivering scents of pear, delicious apple, pastry cream, chalky minerality and white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a nicely integrated girdle of acidity, a lovely core of fruit, fine, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the still youthful, but inviting finish. I might actually opt for drinking this bottling over the near-term and let the earlier disgorgement rest in the cellar, as this is a bit more open out of the blocks. Good juice. 2017-2035. **91.**

Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Cramant) Disgorged June 2015

This is one of the current releases of Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” non-vintage Brut, as at the timing of this article the cuvée was changing over in the New York market and the importer was kind enough to send me both disgorgements. This bottling is from the base year of 2012 and the wine remains young in personality and shows fine potential, wafting from the glass in a promising bouquet of apple, pear, chalky minerality, a touch of *crème patissière* and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a superb core, great backend mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and impressive nascent complexity. Like all of the Lilbert wines, this is built for the long haul and is still a puppy, but it will be excellent in a couple of years (and is still very easy to drink today). 2019-2035+. **91.**

Lilbert-Fils “Perle” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (Cramant) Disgorged June 2015

As readers may recall, the Perle cuvée from Lilbert-Fils is their old vine bottling of Blanc de Blancs that is bottled with a lower pressure than their standard non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut NV. It is the house’s most limited release cuvée, as only one hundred and sixty-five cases are produced each year. The current release is a blend of thirty percent 2011, forty percent 2010 and thirty percent 2009 juice. The cuvée is finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine wafts from the glass in a refined blend of lemon, pear, brioche, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely soil signature, light, frothy *mousse*, bright, nicely buried acids and impressive length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. The lower pressure makes this very, very easy to enjoy out of the blocks, but this wine will also age very well indeed. 2017-2035+. **92.**

Champagne Lombard Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Nature (Épernay) Disg: Dec. 2016

The current release of Lombard’s Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut Nature is from the base year of 2011 and is the same as the bottle I tasted a year ago, with the grapes coming principally from Mesnil-sur-Oger (fifty percent) and augmented by grapes from the villages of Chouilly, Cramant and Avize. The wine spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine wafts from the glass in a classic aromatic blend of apple, pear, almond, a touch of pastry cream, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a deep core, elegant *mousse* and very good focus on the long and complex finish. This is a more recent disgorgement than the last bottle I tasted, but it is still the same wine and is a lovely example. 2017-2030. **91.**

Champagne Lombard “Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Épernay) Disg: 3/16

I really like the new release of Champagne Lombard’s Blanc de Blancs from Mesnil-sur-Oger, but this is still a young wine and will need some time in the cellar to blossom from behind its sturdy structural elements. This is from the base year of 2011 and is a very strong example of this more difficult year. The bouquet is deep and youthful, offering up scents of apple, wheat toast, plenty of smokiness, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and fine length and grip on the youthful and lemony finish. Without any buffering *dosage*, this wine is still quite brisk and could do with some cellaring to soften up a bit more. But, it will be excellent when it has blossomed and probably merit a higher score. 2019-2030+. **91+**.

Pierre Moncuit “Hugues de Coulmet” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Mesnil) Disg: Dec. 2016

As readers will recall, the Hugues de Coulmet bottling is produced from the Moncuit family’s vines in the village of Sézanne, rather than their vineyards in Mesnil. The new release is from the base year of 2013 and was finished off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter, after the wine spent two and a half years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet on the new release is very pretty, delivering a fine constellation of pear, fresh almond, limestone, minerality, a touch of *crème patissière* and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied and nicely defined by its minerality, with frothy *mousse*, good focus and grip and a long, still quite youthful finish. This is a youthful bottle that needs a bit more bottle age to really start to express itself on the palate, but which will be quite tasty once it has softened up a bit more, though it will never have the same breed as the family’s bottlings from their vineyards in Mesnil-sur-Oger. 2018-2035. **89+**.

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger) Disg: 2/16

As I mentioned last year, this is the same wine as their Grand Cru Brut non-vintage bottling, but just finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter, rather than the seven grams of the Brut bottling. This is from the base year of 2013 and offers up a fine, youthful nose of lemon, delicious apple, bread dough, chalky soil tones and spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, focused and full-bodied, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, fine balance and a long, youthfully complex finish. This is good juice, but with its lower *dosage*, to my palate it could do with a year or two in the cellar to blossom a bit more, as it does not have quite the same buffer of the Brut version from the higher *dosage* - though Extra Brut fans will have no difficulty enjoying it immensely right out of the blocks! 2019-2035. **91+**.

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Mesnil) Disgorged March 2016

As my bottle of this wine last year was base year 2012, this must be the 2013, as it was disgorged one year later. All of the Moncuit family’s non-vintage bottlings are actually from a single vintage, as the house does not like to add reserve wines. This bottling is produced with fruit from the family’s vineyards in Mesnil, with the *vins clairs* fermented with indigenous yeasts and the wine is finished off this year with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter after two and a half years aging *sur latte*. The bouquet of the new release is lovely, complex and nicely high-toned in style, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, fresh almond, brioche, a touch of lemon chiffon, spring flowers and a superb base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is young, crisp and full-bodied, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the nascently complex and nicely balanced finish. This is a bit more reserved out of the blocks than the 2012 version and could do with a few years in the cellar to really blossom. It will be excellent once it has opened up and relaxed a bit structurally. 2019-2035+. **91+**.

Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Reims)**Disgorged November 2015**

I love the biodegradable red film that now wraps this bottling, as it allows the wine to be served in a clear glass bottle, but protects the wine from ultraviolet rays during its time in the market prior to opening. All of the fruit for the Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs hails from vineyards in Oger and Mesnil, with the wine having spent a minimum of four years aging *sur latte* and another ten months post-disgorgement recovering in the cellars in Reims prior to release. If my calculations are correct, this is from the base year of 2010. The wine delivers a complex and refined aromatic constellation of pear, apple, almond pastry cream, chalky minerality, white lilies and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant, with refined *mousse*, bright, seamless acids, great focus and grip and a very, very long, complex finish. Both Oger and Mesnil tend to produce more broad-shouldered wines in general, but the Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs is the epitome of elegance and absolutely great juice. 2017-2040. **93.**

Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Quality” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Ludes)

I have been drinking the wines from the Ployez family since the mid-1980s, but this is the first example of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs that I have ever had the pleasure to taste from this fine estate and it is a fine addition to their lineup. The *dosage* of this bottling is three grams per liter and the bouquet is excellent, offering up a deep and youthfully complex mix of pear, apple, a touch of hazelnut, warm biscuits, lovely soil tones and just a touch of oak influence from the barrel fermentation of the *vins clairs*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful in profile, with an excellent core and mineral signature, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and lovely focus and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is approachable now, but really deserves a bit of bottle age to relax a bit more structurally and really start to sing. It is an excellent wine. 2019-2035+. **91+.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “le Quintette” Extra Brut NV (Pierry)**Disgorged June 2016**

The le Quintette bottling from Jean-Marc Sélèque is a Blanc de Blancs that he selects from five different *lieux à dits*- hence the name. Half of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the other half raised in tank, with the current release hailing from the base year of 2012 and the wine finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter, after more than three years aging *sur latte*. The wine delivers exceptional aromatic complexity in its mélange of pear, fresh almond, chalky minerality, brioche, white flowers and just a hint of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full and focused, with a rock solid core, very refined *mousse*, lovely complexity and breed, bright, well-buffered acids and outstanding length and grip on the classy finish. Despite its relatively modest *dosage*, this wine is perfectly balanced and already very easy to drink, though it will be even better with five or six years in the cellar. Great juice. 2017-2040. **92.**

Champagne Suenen “Oiry” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant) Disg: Jan. 2017

Readers may recall that when I visited Aurélien Suenen in his cellars in Cramant back in the spring of 2015, he was just starting work on these single *villages* bottlings from the base year of 2013, as he has chardonnay holdings in the villages of Cramant, Chouilly, Oiry and Cuis. The Oiry is the first of these wines to be released, which is made entirely from his production in the village, so as to highlight the village’s *terroir* more in the finished wine. This was fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts (this is the first vintage to be entirely native yeasts, as he has been building up his yeast population in his cellars, given that his father before him used commercial yeasts, so that his 2012 wines were a combination of the two). The wine was finished with a *dosage* of one gram per liter and offers up a deep and complex nose of apple,

nutskin, fresh-baked bread, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a nice touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nascently complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a very long, poised and impeccably balanced finish. This is a lovely wine and probably the first I have ever tasted that is produced entirely from Oiry fruit. It is very approachable today, but it is still a young wine and should be even better with four or five years' worth of bottle age. 2017-2040. **92.**

Champagne Suenen Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Cramant) Disgorged May 2016

The new release of Aurélien Suenen's non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is from the base year of 2013 and is labeled this year as Extra Brut. The wine is still youthful and really needs a few years in the cellar to blossom a bit more, as this has a proper girdle of acidity to carry it far into the future. The bouquet offers up a fine, still quite primary blend of pear, lemon, bread dough, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully bracing, with a rock solid core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a very long, snappy and beautifully balanced finish. Give this another two or three years in the cellar to allow it to really blossom. 2020-2040. **92.**



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

Champagne Suenen “Grand Cru” Blc de Bles Extra Brut NV (Cramant) Disg: Oct. 2016

The new “Grand Cru” cuvée from Aurélien Suenen is a blend of his fruit from the villages of Cramant and Chouilly and hails from the base year of 2013. I tasted this wine in its very early phase while visiting in the cellars and I was happy to see the promise it showed out of

the blocks has been completely realized in the finished wine. The *vins clairs* here were partially barrel-fermented and aged nine months in the cellars prior to blending (in a combination of tanks and casks), with the *dosage* here just a touch higher than in the Oiry bottling, coming in at two grams per liter. The wine is showing brilliantly today, soaring from the glass in a deep and very pure bouquet of pear, almond, brioche, complex limestone minerality, just a whisper of buttery oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with great focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a very, very long and precise finish. This, again, is approachable today, but really deserves some time in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. Great juice. 2017-2040. **93+**.

Non-Vintage Brut

Ayala “Brut Majeur” NV (Aÿ)

Disgorged September 2016

The current release of the consistently fine Ayala “Brut Majeur” is composed of a blend of forty percent each of pinot noir and chardonnay and twenty percent pinot meunier. This is from the base year of 2012 and aged for a bit over three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, discreet smokiness, a hint of nutskin and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **90+**.

Robert Barbichon Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine)

Disgorged March 2016

Thomas Barbichon is making beautiful wines in this fine corner of the Aube, with his Blanc de Noirs bottling composed entirely of pinot noir. This is from the base year of 2013 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, after having spent two years aging *sur latte*. The wine delivers a fine bouquet of white peach, *patissière*, chalky minerality, dried flowers and incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully brisk, with a good core, fine soil inflection, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex finish. This is fine juice that will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. 2017-2035. **91**.

Robert Barbichon et Fils “Réserve 4 Cépages” Brut NV (Gyé sur Seine) Disg: Oct. 2015

The current release of the Quatre Cépages bottling Thomas Barbichon is from the base year of 2011 and is made up of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and ten percent each of chardonnay, pinot blanc and pinot meunier. The wine this year was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter and delivers a fine bouquet of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the wide open, complex finish. This is a very stylish example of the difficult 2011 growing season. 2017-2030. **90**.

R. H. Coutier “Brut Tradition” NV (Ambonnay)

Disgorged October 2016

The current release of R. H. Coutier’s “Brut Tradition” is composed of its customary blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay, with the wine hailing from the base year of 2012. The *vins clairs* are fermented in stainless steel, go through full malo and were finished this year with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and classy, offering up a superb blend of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, complex soil tones and a gentle touch of nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-

bodied and complex, with excellent mid-palate core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. A classic expression of Ambonnay fruit and soil. 2017-2035. **92.**

Dehours et Fils “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port) Disgorged June 2016

The Grande Réserve bottling from Jérôme Dehours is currently from the base year of 2012 and spent three and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. A quarter of the cuvée each year is taken from a reserve wine solera that Monsieur Dehours started in 1988, which gives the wine marvelous aromatic complexity right out of the blocks. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter in this year. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a refined blend of apple, warm biscuits, toasted almond, a beautiful base of soil tones, dried flowers and a bit of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced and zesty finish. This could do with a year or two in the cellar to more fully blossom on the palate and should age very well indeed. A fine, fine Brut NV! 2017-2035. **91+.**

Dehours et Fils “Les Vignes de la Vallée” Brut NV (Mareuil-le-Port) Disgorged June 2016

The Dehours et Fils “Les Vignes de la Vallée” non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of seventy-five percent pinot meunier, nineteen percent chardonnay and six percent pinot noir. The base year of the current release is 2010 and one-third of the blend is reserve wines from Monsieur Dehour’s 1988 solera. The *vins clairs* go through full malolactic fermentation and the wine is finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine offers up excellent complexity in its bouquet of apple, wheat toast, hazelnut, a fine base of soil, white peach and a lovely myriad of gentle meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a very long, perfectly balanced and zesty finish. This is still a fairly young wine structurally, but with the addition of the solera reserve wines, it has a level of complexity that is already very appealing. 2017-2035. **92+.**

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery) Disgorged June 2016

Fabrice Goss’s current release of his Cuvée Spéciale in the market is from the base year of 2012, with a bit of 2011 blended in as a reserve wine. The *cépages* of the 2012 version is forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. As readers may recall, the *vins clairs* here are barrel-fermented in ancient casks sourced from Bollinger and never go through malolactic fermentation. I last tasted the 2012 version of Cuvée Spéciale during my visit to Fabrice’s cellars in Damery in the spring of 2015, where it was still too young for release. The wine is superb now that it has hit the market, offering up a pure and vibrant bouquet of pear, chalky minerality, spring flowers, brioche, fresh almond and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, great focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, nascently complex and perfectly balanced finish. This is still very early days for this superb wine, and I would not hesitate to tuck it away in the cellar for at least three or four more years before starting to drink it in earnest. 2020-2045. **93.**



Fabrice Goss of Champagne Alexandre Filaine in his vineyards in Damery.

Gatinois “Brut Tradition” Grand Cru NV (Aÿ)

Disgorged March 2016

The current bottling of Gatinois Brut Tradition is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* fermented and raised in stainless steel and going through full malolactic fermentation. The wine is from the base year of 2012, with the customary thirty percent reserve wines included and the *dosage* this year is six grams per liter. The wine offers up classic Aÿ pinot noir tones in its complex bouquet of peach, apple, *patissière*, complex soil nuances, dried flowers and a discreet topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and vinous in personality, with a lovey core, fine soil signature, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the classic finish. Lovely juice, as it always is from year to year. 2017-2035+. **92.**

Henri Giraud “Code Noir” Brut NV (Aÿ)

The Henri Giraud “Code Noir” non-vintage Brut is composed entirely from pinot noir. The current release offers up a lovely nose of apple, orange peel, chalky minerality, brioche, a touch of vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is fullish, young and frothy, with a good core, bright acids and quite good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is a good bottle that will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2017-2030+. **90.**

Henri Giraud “Fût de Chêne” Brut NV (Aÿ)

Disgorged September 2016

The new release of Henri Giraud’s “Fût de Chêne” is an excellent young wine, but I would definitely opt to tuck it away in the cellar for another four or five years and allow some of

its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. This is from the base year of 2010 and is composed of a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. The bouquet is deep and very refined, wafting from the glass in a blend of white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, dried flowers, plenty of smokiness and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full, crisp and elegant, with the new oak nicely understated. The wine has a fine core, very elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the long, nascently complex finish. While some tasters may object to the bit of new wood showing through here on both the nose and palate, I find it very nicely done and it should fold seamlessly into the base complexity of the wine with extended bottle age. 2021-2050+. **93+**.

Henri Giraud “Hommage à François Hémart” Brut NV (Aÿ)

The cuvée of Henri Giraud “Hommage à François Hémart” is a blend of seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* raised in a combination of stainless steel (six months) and barrel for an additional six months prior to bottling. The new release offers up a deft touch of oakiness in its bouquet of peach, apple, *crème patissière*, hazelnut, lovely soil tones and the aforementioned vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, vibrant and full, with a fine core, excellent complexity, frothy *mousse* and a long, zesty and complex finish. I really like the how the oak here is seamlessly integrated into the base of the wine from its extended aging in its *vins clairs* phase, but there is plenty of bright acidity here to give the wine lift and grip on the backend. 2017-2035. **91+**.

Philippe Gonet “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The release currently in the market of Philippe Gonet “Grande Réserve” non-vintage Brut is made from a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot meunier. The wine is aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet offers up a complex blend of apple, white peach, a touch of honeysuckle, brioche and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with slightly larger bubbles, good focus and grip and a long, fairly complex finish. This is good, solid juice. 2017-2030. **89**.

Gosset “Brut Excellence” NV (Épernay)

The new release of Gosset’s non-vintage “Brut Excellence” is composed of a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-six percent chardonnay and nineteen percent pinot meunier. I had not tasted a new version of this fine non-vintage Brut since the summer of 2014, when the base year was 2009, so three years later, I am assuming that this current bottling is from the base year of 2012. The wine shows lovely complexity on the nose, offering up scents of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. 2017-2027+. **90**.

Gosset “Grande Réserve” NV (Épernay)

The current bottling of Gosset “Grande Réserve” in the market is composed of a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty-six percent pinot noir and nineteen percent pinot meunier. Like all of the Gosset bottlings, with the exception of the Brut Excellence, the *vins clairs* here do not go through malolactic fermentation. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a bright blend that shows some signs of secondary development in its constellation of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty from its lack of malo, with excellent intensity at the core, refined, pinpoint bubbles, excellent focus and grip and a very long, complex and classy finish. Great juice. 2017-2035+. **92+**.

Krug “Grande Cuvée” 164ème Édition Brut NV (Reims)**ID #216016**

The 164th Edition of Krug “Grande Cuvée” is absolutely brilliant and one of the best iterations of this iconic wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. This is not surprising, as it is from the base year of 2008, though the team at Krug utilized reserve wines all the way back to 1990 in this version. The final *cépages* is forty-eight percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and seventeen percent pinot meunier, with the wine spending eight years in the Krug cellars *sur latte*. The beautiful bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, very complex soil tones, white flowers, incipient smokiness and just a hint of the caraway seed to come with bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and seamlessly balanced, with a great core, utterly refined *mousse*, superb focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and zesty finish. The vibrancy of the exceptional base year of 2008 is very much in evidence here and this is destined to be one of the all-time great Grande Cuvées. **2017-2065+. 95.**

Le Brun Servenay “Brut Sélection” NV (Avize)

There is no date of disgorgement on the back label of the current release of Le Brun Servenay “Brut Sélection”, but as the last example I tasted of this cuvée was two years ago and hailed from the base year of 2011, I am guessing that this is from the base year of 2013. As readers may recall, this bottling is actually a blanc de blancs, though there is no mention of this on the label. Traditionally, the Brut Sélection spends three years aging *sur latte*, is finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter and, like all of the wines from this Avize-based domaine, the *vins clairs* do not go through malo. The new release offers up a fine, youthful nose of pear, apple, *crème patissière*, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly brisk in personality, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, fine focus and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not the longest non-vintage Blanc de Blancs out there, but the wine has depth, incipient complexity and fine soil signature and is a strong example. Good juice that will only get better with a bit of bottle age. **2017-2030. 90+.**

Laherte Frères “Ultradition” Brut NV (Chavot)**Disgorged July 2015**

The current release of Laherte Frères non-vintage “Ultradition” Brut is composed from an atypical and highly attractive *cépages* of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir and was finished with a *dosage* of six to eight grams per liter. This is from the base year of 2012 and the wine is outstanding, offering up a very refined, meunier-dominated constellation of white peach, loads of spring flowers, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a dollop of brioche in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and extremely elegant, with a fine core, superb soil signature, refined *mousse* and a very long, complex and dancing finish. This is a beautiful bottle of non-vintage Brut! **2017-2035. 92+.**

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

The new release of Lamiable non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The wine only spends eighteen months aging *sur latte*, so I am guessing that this is from the 2012 or 2013 base year, though there is no date of disgorgement on the back label, which would be very useful. In any case, the wine offers up a very good, youthful nose of apple, *patissière*, smoky overtones, a good base of soil and incipient nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, slightly coarse *mousse*, but fine focus and grip on the long and zesty finish. This is a very good bottle of Brut NV, but I have to believe that the bubbles would be finer with a bit longer aging *sur latte*. That said, this is my only complaint with a wine that has admirable

depth and complexity and could easily move up to the next level with just a bit more refinement to the *mousse*. 2017-2030. **90.**

Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut NV (Ambonnay)

I drank this wine in Beaune in the spring of last year, but the bottle did not have a date of disgorgement anywhere on the label. It must have been the most recent disgorgement at the time, as the wine was still young and racy, offering up a lovely, albeit still quite primary bouquet of tart peach, apple, stony minerality, gentle smokiness and a topnote of lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, laser-like focus, pinpoint bubbles and lovely balance on the very long, precise and minerally finish. Fine juice in the making, but it deserves some time in the cellar. 2018-2040. **93.**

Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” Brut NV (Buxeuil)

Disgorged October 2016

The Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” non-vintage Brut is its customary pure pinot noir in its newest iteration, which hails from the base year of 2013. The wine was finished off this year with a *dosage* of ten grams per liter, and of course, as is the house style, did not go through malo. The bouquet is pure and vibrant, offering up a lovely constellation of apple, white peach, *patissière*, flinty minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, zesty and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is a lovely and very well-balanced wine that is still a tad on the young side, but is eminently drinkable today, but will be even better with a year or two in the cellar. Fine juice. 2017-2035. **92.**

Philipponnat “Royale Réserve” Brut NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

Disgorged March 2016

The new release of Philipponnat “Royale Réserve” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2012 and was aged just over three years *sur latte*. The *cépages* is sixty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier this year, with thirty percent of the blend comprised of older reserve wines from the house’s solera system. The wine was finished off with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter and the *vins clairs* went through partial malo. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality and a topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and focused, with a fine core, a zesty girdle of acidity, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the youthfully complex finish. This is still a young wine and a year or two in the cellar will really pay dividends, though it is already quite tasty. 2019-2035+. **91+.**

Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Quality” Brut NV (Ludes)

Disgorged October 2016

The current release of Ployez-Jacquemart’s “Extra Quality” Brut NV is from the base year of 2011 and is comprised of a blend of twenty-two percent pinot noir and thirty-nine percent each chardonnay and pinot meunier. The wine spent more than four years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine delivers the customary purity of fruit on the nose that is the Ployez-Jacquemart calling card, offering up scents of pear, apple, warm biscuits, lovely soil complexity and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely racy, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. The *cépages* this year is a bit different than customary from this bottling, with more pinot meunier in the cuvée, which I assume is a reflection of which grape did best in this vintage in the eyes of Laurence Ployez. Consequently, it is a touch leaner stylistically than the last few releases of Extra Quality Brut, but no less complex or satisfying. 2017-2030. **91.**

Louis Roederer “Brut Premier” NV (Reims)

The new release of Brut Premier is from the base year of 2012 and was disgorged in the spring of 2016, after spending three years aging on its fine lees. The wine is its customary blend

of forty percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and still youthful blend of apple, white peach, gentle leanness, *patissière*, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with excellent mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, poised and complex finish. This will be even better with some bottle age and is a fine iteration of this consistently excellent cuvée. 2017-2037+. **92.**

Pol Roger “Réserve” Brut NV (Épernay)

The new release of Pol Roger’s “white label” non-vintage Brut is very pretty, but I am guessing that this release is base year 2011, as it is a tad more delicate stylistically than the last couple of releases. The wine offers up a complex and classy nose of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a touch of spring flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite open and tasty right now, with very good depth at the core, refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, elegant and complex finish. I do not think this iteration will be quite as age-worthy as most releases (this is probably the finest non-vintage Brut for long-term cellaring from any of the *Grandes Marques*), but for drinking over the next decade, there is plenty of enjoyment to be had. 2017-2027. **91.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Brut NV (Pierry)

Disgorged August 2015

The current release of Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “Solessence” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2013 and is comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir. This is the same wine that I reviewed in October of last year, but from an earlier disgorgement, and it includes fifty percent reserve wines and was finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. Jean-Marc has begun to age all of his wines on cork, rather than crown cap, which is only adding to the textural complexity of this superb wines. The Solessence Brut NV delivers lovely aromatic complexity in its blend of apple, pear, meunier floral tones, brioche, chalky minerality, almond and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and still youthful finish. This is a beautiful bottle of bubbly, with the nose really starting to show some secondary layers, now that it is nearly two years out from its disgorgement, but with the palate still zesty and loaded with the verve of youth. Jean-Marc Sélèque is one of the brightest young stars in Champagne! Fine, fine non-vintage Brut. 2017-2035. **92.**

Taittinger “Brut Réserve” NV (Reims)

The new release of Taittinger’s non-vintage “Brut Réserve” is composed of a blend of forty percent chardonnay and thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. This is essentially the same wine as their “La Française” bottling, but with only two years of aging *sur latte*, rather than the three years for the “La Française”. The wine offers up a very pretty nose of apple, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine focus, elegant *mousse* and fairly brisk acidity adding cut on the long finish. This is very nicely made and is quite tasty now, but will also age very well. 2017-2035. **90.**

Taittinger “Brut La Française” NV (Reims)

The current bottling of Taittinger’s “Brut La Française” shares the same *cépages* as the Brut Réserve (forty percent chardonnay, thirty-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier), with the wine spending one additional year aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet on the wine is lovely, offering a classy blend of pear, apple, a complex base of limestone soil, bread dough, gently musky, meunier floral tones and a bit of

smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full and zesty, with fine mid-palate depth, youthful acids, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the still quite primary finish. This has such nice balance that it is eminently drinkable today, but it really is still a puppy and would be happy with a bit of bottle age to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2017-2035. **91+**.

Taittinger “Folies de la Marquetterie” Brut NV (Reims)

The current bottling of Taittinger’s “Folies de la Marquetterie”, which hails from their single vineyard outside of the eponymous château in Pierry, is comprised of a blend of fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay. Though there is no information on the date of disgorgement on the back label or on the website, the wine does age five years *sur latte* prior to being disgorged. The bouquet is excellent, offering up a very refined mélange of nectarine, brioche, lovely soil tones, spring flowers, discreet smokiness and a nice touch of *patissière* from the pinot noir component in the blend. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and a long, youthful and classy finish. This could do with a bit more bottle age, as the *dosage* still shows a touch on the backend and needs another six to twelve months to be seamlessly integrated. This should prove to be a long-distance runner and will be best five years down the road. 2017-2040+. **92+**.

Taittinger “Prélude” Grand Cru Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Taittinger “Prélude” is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir and was aged five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a deep and complex nose of apple, lemon, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread, incipient smokiness and a touch of oak char in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with lovely focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the youthfully structured, but very promising finish. Like many recent releases of Prélude, this wine needs time, but it will be outstanding when it is fully ready to drink. 2021-2055+. **93**.

Champagne Tarlant Brut NV (Oeuilly)

Disgorged February 2015

I drank this bottle in Beaune in the spring of last year, having snapped it up at my favorite wine shop in the town, as I do not see the non-vintage Brut bottling from Benoit Tarlant, as the estate produces probably ninety percent Extra Brut and Brut Nature bottlings. That is not to say that they are not also quite deft when adding a bit of *dosage*, as this wine is perfectly balanced and every bit as fine as one has come to expect from this outstanding domaine in Oeuilly. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of apple, orange zest, fresh-baked bread, excellent minerality and a nice, gentle topnote of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, classy and complex finish. This is fine, fine Brut NV and an absolute steal when purchased in Beaune! 2016-2035. **91+**.

Veuve Clicquot Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Veuve Clicquot’s “Yellow Label” bottling of non-vintage Brut is approximately a blend of fifty percent pinot noir, twenty percent pinot meunier and thirty percent chardonnay. The wine offers up a bright and precise bouquet of lemon, apple, bread dough, a nice touch of minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles, good backend mineral drive and a long, brisk and focused finish. This is not the most complex non-vintage Brut on the market, but it has moved up dramatically in quality from where it was ten years ago and is a harbinger of even better things to come from this *Grand Maison* in the not too distant future. 2017-2030. **89+**.

Marie Weiss Brut NV (Ludes)**Disgorged March 2016**

The second label of Ployez-Jacquemart, Marie Weiss continues to be one of the best-kept secrets in the world of Champagne, as this wine delivers impressive quality at a very, very fair price! The new release offers up a bright and complex bouquet of apple, brioche, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of lemon zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and beautifully balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. This is a very well-made Champagne from purchased grapes that shows plenty of the Ployez family's *savoir-faire*. 2017-2030. **90**.

**Non-Vintage Brut and Extra Brut Rosé
Ayala “Rosé Majeur” Brut NV (Aÿ)****Disgorged July 2016**

The new release of Ayala “Rosé Majeur” non-vintage Brut is comprised of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot noir and ten percent pinot meunier, with six percent of the pinot noir being still red wine. The wine spent three years aging *sur latte*, so this is base year 2012 and it was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The beautiful ruby salmon color is followed by a classy bouquet of blood orange, a touch of rhubarb, beautiful spice tones, chalky minerality, rye bread and a gentle topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a good core, brisk acids, pinpoint bubbles and good, solid length and grip on the youthful finish. Like the previous iteration I reviewed in December, this wine is already approachable, but will be even better with a bit of bottle age. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **90**.

R. H. Coutier “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay) Disgorged November 2016

The current release of the Coutier Brut Rosé is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, with half of the pinot noir still red wine in the blend. The current release is from the base year of 2012, with a percentage of reserve wines and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter after aging *sur latte* for three and a half years. The bouquet is excellent, jumping from the glass in a vibrant mix of blood orange, wild strawberries, chalky soil tones, smoke, warm bread and a delicate topnote of rhubarb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with an excellent core, pinpoint bubbles, excellent focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. Lovely Brut Rosé. 2017-2030. **92+**.

Jacques Defrance “Native” Brut Rosé NV (les Riceys)

The current release of non-vintage “Native” Brut Rosé from Jacques Defrance is quite deep salmon in color (this is *saignée* method) and hails from the base year of 2012. It was finished with a *dosage* of eleven grams per liter. The wine offers up a bright and spicy bouquet of cherries, cloves, rose petals, chalky soil tones and rye bread. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused and vinous finish. The nose is fairly exotic in its spice tones and there is good depth and complexity here, but the *dosage* seems overly generous to my palate and takes away some of the purity on the backend. It would be a good starter Champagne for someone just being introduced to the genre, but is a bit sweet for seasoned palates. 2017-2027. **87**.

Gatinois “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ) Disgorged July 2015

The new release of Gatinois non-vintage Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2012 and is its customary blend of ten percent chardonnay and ninety percent pinot noir, sourced from the family’s vineyards in Aÿ, with all of the *vins clairs* fermented in stainless steel and having gone through full malo. The red still pinot that goes into the blend (seven percent) hails from sixty year-old vines and is raised in casks, so one can sense a nice touch of the oak in the finished wine as a result. The modest *dosage* of this cuvée this year is six grams per liter. This is more generous than the last version I tasted, from base year 2010, and is drinking beautifully already, soaring from the glass in a refined aromatic blend of blood orange, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones, wheat toast and a discreet smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a touch spicy, with a superb core of fruit, lovely soil signature, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the zesty and complex finish. Gatinois makes really high class Brut Rosé and this new release is another ringing success from this under the radar, first rate Aÿ producer. 2017-2035. **92**.

Henri Giraud “Fût de Chêne” Grand Cru Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ) Disgorged January 2014

The new release of the Henri Giraud “Fût de Chêne” Grand Cru Brut Rosé is excellent, offering up a complex nose of tangerine, *fraises du bois*, rye toast, beautiful soil tones, a touch of cinnamon and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with a lovely core, superb mineral drive, refined, frothy *mousse* and a very long, very elegant finish. There is a touch of oak influence here on both the nose and palate, but it is quite understated and beautifully integrated. This is a blend of seventy-eight percent pinot noir and twenty-two percent chardonnay. It is from the base year of 2007, with forty percent of the cuvée comprised of reserve wines and it was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. Absolutely first class Rosé! 2017-2035. **94+**.

Philippe Gonet Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil-sur-Oger)

The house of Philippe Gonet is now run by Pierre Gonet and his sister Chantal. Their Brut Rosé is composed of ninety percent chardonnay (all hailing from Mesnil-sur-Oger) and ten

percent pinot noir from the nearby town of Vertus. The wine ages three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, with the color a lovely, pale salmon. The current release offers up a pretty bouquet of baked strawberries, tangerine, chalky soil, gentle smokiness and rye toast. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the nicely focused finish. The *dosage* here seems just a whisper generous to my palate, which steals a touch of precision on the backend, but this is a very tasty, aperitif weight bottle of Brut Rosé. 2017-2027. **88.**

Krug Brut Rosé NV Reims ID Number 115021

The new release of Krug Brut Rosé, which is the twentieth edition of this wine, is from the base year of 2007, with reserve wines (composing thirty-two percent of the blend) dating back to 2002. The *cépages* is forty-seven percent pinot noir, thirty-seven percent chardonnay and sixteen percent pinot meunier. The wine spent nine years aging *sur latte* and the blend includes ten percent still red wine, giving it its beautiful salmon color. The bouquet is pure, complex and the embodiment of refinement, offering up scents of tangerine, cherry skin, wheat toast, a classy base of soil and a myriad of gentle spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with an excellent core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a very, very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Just a beautifully complete and understated wine that demands contemplation. 2017-2040. **95.**

Lamiable “Grand Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Tours sur Marne) Disgorged November 2016

The current release of Lamiable non-vintage Brut Rosé has a *cépages* of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. The *vins clairs* are vinified in stainless steel and undergo a full malo, with the wine aged *sur latte* two years prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is quite a deep cherry red and offers up a fine nose of cherries, cloves, rye toast, a nice base of soil and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and fairly vinous in style, with a good core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is not the most complex bottle of Brut Rosé and is just a touch generously *dosé*, but there is depth and good length here as well. 2017-2027. **90.**

Laherte Frères “Ultradition” Brut Rosé NV (Chavot) Disgorged January 2016

The Laherte Frères “Ultradition” non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed entirely of pinot meunier, which is fermented in a combination of tanks, older casks and *foudres* and spends seven months aging as *vins clairs* in cask prior to blending and bottling for its secondary fermentation. This is base year 2012 and was aged two and a half years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The *dosage* is 6.5 grams per liter. The wine is a beautiful cherry-salmon color and offers up a sophisticated bouquet of red berries, violets, a complex base of soil, rye bread, incipient smokiness and gentle meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and laser-like in its focus, with a fine core, impeccable focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and still fairly tightly-knit finish. This is approachable today, but is built to age and will be even better three to five years down the road. Impressive juice. 2017-2035+. **92.**

Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Rosé NV Disgorged September 2016

The new release of Cumières Rosé from Vincent Laval is from the base year of 2014 and is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier. This only spent eighteen or nineteen months aging *sur latte*, which is quite short, but the wine has turned out quite beautifully. Vincent makes his Rosé by the *saignée* method. The 2014 version offers up a deep cherry color and a complex and vinous bouquet of blood orange, cherries, clove-like spices, a beautiful base of soil and a

topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full and plenty vinous again, echoing the style of the bouquet, with a fine core, impressive nascent complexity, refined *mousse* and superb length and grip on the soil-driven and beautifully balanced finish. Vincent Laval's non-vintage Rosé bottlings age beautifully, so I would expect this wine to be even better a decade down the road, but it is not going to be all that easy to keep one's hands off of it in the interim! 2017-2040. **92.**

Le Brun Servenay “Extra Brut Rosé” NV (Avize)

The Le Brun Servenay non-vintage “Extra Brut Rosé” is composed of a blend of ninety percent chardonnay and ten percent a blend of both pinot noir and pinot meunier, with both red grapes being added to the blend as still red wine. The *dosage* of the Extra Brut bottling is 3.5 grams per liter and the wine spent a minimum of three years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is a beautiful salmon color and delivers a fine bouquet of blood orange, strawberry chiffon, chalky soil tones, dried rose petals and a touch of brioche. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and focused, with a good core, fine soil signature, brisk, youthful acidity, pinpoint bubbles and good, but not great length on the well-balanced finish. With its lower *dosage*, this could use another year or two in the cellar to really blossom. It is a good example, but again, I would love to see just a bit more length on the palate. 2018-2030. **89.**

David Léclapart “l’Alchimiste” Extra Brut Rosé NV “V09” (Trépail)

The new release of l’Alchimiste” from David Léclapart is from the 2009 vintage, as the code on the label indicates. The wine is made entirely from pinot noir and the cherry red color is arrived at from twenty-four to seventy-two hours of skin contact. The wine offers up an excellent nose of cherry, rhubarb, rye toast, cloves, dried roses and an exceptional base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, vinous and beautifully balanced finish. This is accessible today, but is still in its infancy and will be even better with some extended bottle age. 2017-2035. **92.**

Champagne Lombard “Premier Cru” Brut Rosé NV (Épernay) Disgorged July 2016

The new iteration of Lombard non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir (ten percent of which is *vin rouge*) and forty percent chardonnay, with the wine hailing from the base year of 2013 and having been finished off with a *dosage* of four grams per liter, after resting *sur latte* for a bit over two years in the cellars. The wine is a fairly deep cherry color and offers up a fine bouquet of cinnamon, cherry, blood orange, gentle smokiness, wheat toast and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is young, crisp and full-bodied, with fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a long, well-balanced and nascently complex finish. This is still on the young side, but all of the components are here for fine drinking down the road, but it could use another year in the cellar to soften up a bit more and really drink with distinction. 2018-2030. **90.**

Pierre Moncuit Brut Rosé NV (Mesnil sur Oger)

Disgorged September 2016

The current release of Pierre Moncuit non-vintage Brut Rosé is a blend of seventy-five percent chardonnay from Mesnil and twenty-five percent pinot noir from Ambonnay, with all of the pinot added as still wine. The wine is from the base year of 2013 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine is a lovely light salmon color and offers up a fine nose of strawberry, blood orange, rye toast, a fine base of chalky soil tones and a touch of clove-like spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and zesty, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the youthful and well-balanced finish. This is already very tasty, but will be even better with another year or two in the cellar. 2017-2027. **91.**

Moutard Père et Fils “Rosé de Cuvaion” Brut NV (Buxeuil) Disgorged October 2016

The new version of Moutard Père et Fils “Rosé de Cuvaion” non-vintage Brut is from the base year of 2013 and is composed entirely of pinot noir. The wine spent nearly three years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of ten grams per liter. The beautiful cherry-salmon color is a prelude to a refined bouquet of blood orange, cherries, clove-like spice tones, rye bread, dried rose petals and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, very good balance and grip and a long, gently vinous finish. This is still a young wine, but the *dosage* is perfect to buffer the youthful acidity and it is already very easy to drink, but it will be even better with a few years in the cellar. 2017-2030. **90.**

Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Incadescent” Rosé Saignée Brut NV (Verzy) Disg: Sept. 2016

The new version of Mouzon-Leroux et Fils “l’Incadescent” Rosé Saignée is from the base year of 2013, with fifty percent of the *vins clairs* again barrel-fermented this year. The *dosage* for the 2013 base year is also down a touch from last year at three grams per liter and the skin contact was eighteen hours, rather than the twenty of last year’s version/ The wine is excellent, wafting from the glass in a fine mélange of strawberries, rhubarb, bread dough, chalky minerality, orange peel, dried rose petals and a whisper of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and classy, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the poised and very well-balanced finish. This is lovely juice. 2017-2030+. **91+.**

Philipponnat “Royale Réserve” Brut Rosé NV (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged March 2016

The new release of Philipponnat “Royale Réserve” Brut Rosé was disgorged in March of 2016, but this wine is from the base year of 2009 and spent fully six years aging *sur latte*! The wine is a blend of seventy-five percent pinot noir, twenty percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier and includes at least twenty-five percent reserve wines. Like all of the Philipponnat wines these days, a percentage of the *vins clairs* are barrel-fermented and the reserve wines are now aged in cask as well. The bouquet on this iteration of “Royale Réserve” Brut Rosé is excellent, offering up scents of tangerine, white cherries, rye bread, a touch of clove-like spice tones, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core and soil signature, frothy *mousse* and a long, zesty and well-balanced finish. This is drinking well, but has plenty of acidity and will have no difficulties aging another ten or more years as well. 2017-2027+. **90.**

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes) Disgorged January 2017

The current release of Ployez-Jacquemart non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and thirteen percent pinot meunier. Ten percent of the pinot noir is still red wine, giving the wine a lovely, pale salmon color and the *dosage* this year is four grams per liter. The base year of the new release is 2013, with a small bit of reserve wine blended in. The bouquet is very refined and lifted in the classic Ployez style, offering up scents of wild strawberries, orange zest, chalky minerality, *patissière*, dried roses and a touch of fresh nutmeg in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and elegant, with a fine core, utterly refined *mousse*, bright acids and impeccable balance on the long, complex and racy finish. This is still a young wine, but very easy to drink today. That said, it is built for at least a few years of bottle age and will really be stunning from 2020 onwards. 2017-2035. **92.**

Camille Savès Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)**Disgorged March 2014**

I find that the Camille Savès non-vintage Brut Rosé really ages nicely and it is probably one of the longer-lived non-vintage bottlings of Rosé out there amongst the smaller houses. This particular release was composed of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay, twenty-eight percent pinot noir and twelve percent Bouzy rouge. The wine is from the base year of 2010 and was finished off with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The wine delivers an excellent nose of cherries, strawberries, rye toast, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a good core, impressive complexity, elegant *mousse* and lovely grip and focus on the long and vibrant finish. This is now fully wide open, but still has plenty of life ahead of it. 2017-2030. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)**Disgorged September 2016**

The new release of Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “Solessence” non-vintage Brut Rosé is from the base year of 2014 and includes forty percent reserve wines. The *cépages* is forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir, with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The new iteration is even finer than last year’s version, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of strawberries, a touch of blood orange, gentle notes of rhubarb, rye toast, chalky soil tones, a bit of clove-like spices and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and zesty, with excellent depth at the core, bright acids, fine *mousse* and impressive backend mineral drive on the long, poised and beautifully balanced finish. This is a complex Brut Rosé that is drinking with distinction in its youth, but will also age very well indeed. High class juice! 2017-2035+. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “les Solistes” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)**Disgorged June 2016**

As I mentioned in October, the “les Solistes” bottling of Extra Brut Rosé from Jean-Marc Sélèque is comprised entirely of pinot meunier, all from the vineyard of les Charmiers in the village of Pierry, with the vines having been planted in 1964 and 1967. This is a late disgorgement of the same base year of 2011 tasted last fall. Monsieur Sélèque give the juice forty-eight hours of skin contact to produce this beautiful salmon color, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented (but not going through malo) and the wine being finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The new disgorgement is every bit as lovely as the previous iteration, offering up a deep and vibrant nose of cherries, blood orange, rye bread, chalky soil tones, lovely spice tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and nicely vinous, with a full-bodied format, excellent focus and balance, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the zesty finish. This spent an additional year on the fine lees, which will benefit it for the long haul, but the wine is still on the youthful side today and is clearly in climbing mode, so it will strongly reward cellaring. 2017-2035+. **92.**

Jean-Marc Sélèque “les Solistes” Extra Brut Rosé NV (Pierry)**Disgorged March 2015**

I was very pleased to be at a friend’s house this June for a tasting and see that he had purchased Jean-Marc Sélèque’s “les Solistes” bottling from last year’s release, as I had just tasted the new release a couple of weeks previous. This is from the same base year of 2011 as the above, with the earlier disgorgement now drinking well and blossoming in a nicely measured manner that augurs extremely well for its long-term evolution in bottle. The bouquet offers up a fine mélange of blood orange, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness, orange zest and a fine array of discreet spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full, crisp and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, impeccable balance and a very long, well-balanced and complex finish. This is blossoming beautifully. 2017-2035. **92.**

Taittinger “Prestige Rosé” Brut NV (Reims)

The new bottling of Taittinger “Prestige Rosé” non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, thirty percent pinot noir and twenty percent pinot meunier. It spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. Half of the pinot noir in the blend is vinified as still red wine. The wine offers up its classic deep salmon color and a lovely, vibrant nose of strawberries, blood orange, wheat toast, a fine base of chalky soil, delicate spice tones (nutmeg and a touch of saffron) and a touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, refined *mousse* and fine length and grip on the zesty finish. This has excellent acidity and will age nicely, but is already drinking with style. 2017-2030+. **91.**



Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Rosé Brut Nature NV (Oeuilly)

Disgorged July 2016

The current release of Champagne Tarlant “Zero” Rosé Brut Nature is from the base year of 2009 and spent five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The blend this year is eighty-five percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot noir, with all of the pinot being still red wine, which gives the cuvée its lovely color. Like all of the non-vintage bottlings from the Tarlant family, the bottling includes a sizable percentage of reserve wines from the previous vintage. The bouquet of the Zero Rosé is excellent, delivering a blend of cherries, orange peel, beautiful spice tones, chalky soil, rye toast and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright,

full-bodied and focused, with excellent mid-palate depth, frothy *mousse*, excellent complexity and a very long, vibrant and beautifully balanced finish. Lovely wine. 2017-2030+. **92.**

Veuve Clicquot Brut Rosé NV (Reims)

The new release of Veuve Clicquot non-vintage Brut Rosé is composed of a blend of roughly forty-five percent pinot noir, fifteen percent pinot meunier, twenty-eight percent chardonnay, with the balance of the cuvée made up of still red wine. Roughly a third of the blend is made up of reserve wines. The bouquet is bright and zesty, offering up scents of cherries, a hint of pomegranate, good minerality, warm bread and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a youthful profile, perfectly respectable depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and a long, snappy finish. This is still a young wine and the *dosage* is probably a touch more generous to buffer the acidity of youth, but the wine is nicely focused and balanced and is another impressively successful non-vintage bottling from the new technical team at Clicquot. I would love to see this bottling someday down the road spend another year aging *sur latte* and given a slightly lower *dosage*. 2017-2027. **89.**

Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2012 Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Cumières) Disg: 7/16

The new vintage of Vincent Laval’s gorgeous Les Chênes bottling was aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. It is a superb wine in the making, but really deserves at least five or six years in the cellar to start to properly blossom. The bouquet is young, pure and very, very promising, jumping from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, complex soil tones, spring flowers, gentle smokiness and a hint of brioche. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, young and tensile, with great mid-palate depth, outstanding transparency, elegant *mousse* and a very, very long, nascently complex and seamlessly balanced finish. To my palate, this is still a bit brisk for current drinking, but five to ten years down the road, this is going to be pure magic! 2022-2060. **95.**

2010 Ayala Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

Disgorged January 2017

The 2010 Ayala Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime is the new release of this house’s vintage Blanc de Blancs, with all of the grapes hailing from the two Côte de Blancs. The wine spent six years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The bouquet of the 2010 wafts from the glass in a classy blend of apple, brioche, a hint of almond, lemon zest, chalky soil tones and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a good core, refined *mousse*, bright acids and a long, well-balanced and still pretty primary finish. This is going to be a lovely wine, but it really deserves more bottle age to allow it to blossom properly. 2020-2045+. **91+.**

2010 Francis Boulard “Les Rachais” Brut Nature NV (Cauroy-lès-Hermonville) Disg: 6/16

The current release of les Rachais from Francis Boulard is from the vintage 2010, with this information appearing on the back label. It is a Blanc de Blancs, with the *vins clairs* going through full malo and being aged in cask. The wine offers up a fine, complex nose of apple, pear, warm biscuits, a touch of nuttiness, lovely soil tones and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with an elegant profile, a good core, refined *mousse* and very good length and grip on the very nicely balanced finish. This is very good juice. 2017-2027+. **91+.**

2010 Georges Laval “Les Chênes” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature Magnum (Cumières)

The 2010 magnums of Les Chênes from Vincent Laval are a special, later-disgorgement of this superb vintage, with only fifty mags produced for the world. It is too bad the wine is going to be so rare in magnum, as it is one of the best young wines from Monsieur Laval that I have ever tasted! I do not know how it stacks up to the regular-sized formats of 2010 Les Chênes, as I have not yet had the pleasure to taste the wine from that earlier disgorgement. In any case, the 2010 magnum version is brilliant, soaring from the glass in a very, very precise and perfumed bouquet of pear, white peach, chalky minerality, brioche, musky floral tones and toasted hazelnuts. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and utterly refined in profile, with great intensity at the core, exceptional complexity, pinpoint bubbles and stunning length and grip on the vibrant and perfectly balanced finish. Brilliant juice. 2019-2060. **97.**

2010 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blanc Brut Vintage (Reims)

The 2010 Louis Roederer Blanc de Blanc Brut Vintage is a lovely example of its year. Twenty percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented this year, with the wines not undergoing malolactic fermentation. After bottling, the wine spent five years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of nine grams per liter, with the pressure in the bottle a bit lower than the other vintage-dated wines from the *maison*. The bouquet of the 2010 delivers a very refined aromatic constellation of apple, a touch of tangerine, fresh-baked bread, complex, limestone soil tones, a touch of almond, white flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and a very long, brisk and well-balanced finish. At age seven, this is just starting to blossom, but I would suggest tucking it away for another three or four years in the cellar and allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2020-2045+. **92+.**

2009 Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mesnil-sur-Oger) Disg: April 2016

The 2009 Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs is a very good example of the vintage, offering up the forward fruit of '09, coupled to fine minerality and a very good girdle of acidity. The bouquet delivers scents of apple, hazelnuts, chalky minerality, plenty of smokiness and a touch of *crème patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, young and full, with a good core, slight coarse *mousse*, and good length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. I very much like the combination of nuttiness and pastry cream on the nose here, but the palate still seems somewhat unsettled and the wine is in need of further bottle age. If the palate can eventually offer the same polish of the nose, my score will seem conservative, but it has a bit of catching up to do right now. 2020-2040. **88+.**

2009 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2009 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs is an excellent example of the vintage, with the ripeness of this year giving the wine a forward and succulent character right out of the blocks. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a blend of pear, apple, orange zest, warm bread, chalky minerality and upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite wide open already, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and zesty finish. Most vintages of Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs need several years in the cellar after release to really blossom, but the 2009 is already drinking with great style and generosity. 2017-2035+. **92+.**

2008 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Ludes)

In the year that has passed since I last tasted this beautiful wine, the 2008 Ployez Blanc de Blancs has really started to blossom and is now drinking with great style and breed. The bouquet is deep, complex and beautifully precise, offering up scents of apple, pear, almond, a lovely signature of soil, gentle smokiness, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a touch of vanilla from the barrel-fermentation of the *vins clairs*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and has that rock solid structure of the top 2008s, with a fine core, lovely *mousse* and a very long, well-balanced and racy finish. This is still very early days for this lovely bottle, but it is really starting to stir and it is now quite apparent that I underrated this wine just a bit last year! 2020-2050. **93.**

2007 Philipponnat “Grand Blanc” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disg: November 2015

I love that Philipponnat now gives so much pertinent technical detail on its back labels and wish more of the *Grandes Marques* would follow their lead. The new release of the house's fine vintage-dated Blanc de Blancs was finished with a low *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter and spent seven and a half years aging *sur latte*. The house only uses first pressing juice for this cuvée and allows the *vins clairs* now to age until the following July after the vintage prior to bottling, with a percentage being raised in cask. The 2007 Grand Blanc delivers a deep and classy bouquet of pear, lemon, chalky soil tones, brioche, white flowers and just a whisper of vanilla in the upper register. On the palate the wine is complex and very elegant, with its full-bodied format suave on the attack and zesty on the backend. The wine has an excellent core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the vibrant finish. This is an excellent wine. 2017-2040+. **92+.**

2006 Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésime (Reims)**Disgorged July 2015**

The 2006 Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blanc is composed of a blend of sixty-three percent chardonnay from the Côte de Blancs (Mesnil, Chouilly and Avize) and forty-seven percent chardonnay from the northern side of the Montagne de Reims (Sillery and Puisleux). The wine spent eight-plus years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of pear, apple, incipient notes of hazelnut, a dollop of *crème patissière*, complex, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a hint of the smokiness to come with extended bottle age. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still quite young and brisk, with a fine core, excellent base of soil, elegant *mousse* and a very long, nascently complex finish. This is still very early days for an excellent vintage of Ruinart Blanc de Blancs, and I would try to leave the wine alone in the cellar for at least another six or seven years. 2022-2065. **94.**

2006 Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2006 Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs is an exceptional example of the vintage, offering up a beautiful nose of pear, brioche, fresh almond, chalky minerality, orange peel and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core, refined *mousse*, laser-like focus and very fine cut and grip on the long, perfectly balanced finish. This wine spent nine years aging *sur latte* and in bottle in the cellars prior to release and was finished off with a low *dosage* of five grams per liter. It is a very vibrant and zesty example of the 2006 vintage and is now drinking beautifully, but with the potential for many years of further development in the cellar. Lovely juice. 2017-2040+. **94.**

2005 Corbon “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Avize) Disg: February 2016

The new release from Agnès Corbon is her 2005 vintage Blanc de Blancs, which spent ten years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and preparation for the market. The wine is a very good example of the vintage, offering a complex and slightly exotic bouquet of fresh apricot, pear, hazelnut, brioche, chalky soil tones and a topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a fine core, frothy *mousse*, brisk acids and very good focus and grip on the long, snappy and still quite youthful finish. Like all of the Corbon wines, the *vins clairs* here do not go through malo, so this wine has plenty of acidity to carry it far into the future. 2017-2040. **92.**

2004 Pol Roger Blanc de Blanc Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The last time I tried the 2004 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs it was still quite tight and buttoned up behind its girdle of acidity. I decided to let my bottles rest for a few more years in the cellar before investigating, and this first bottle out of that cache is starting to blossom nicely, but is probably still three years out from its true plateau of maturity. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a still youthful and lovely blend of pear, delicious apple, a delicate touch of lemon curd, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones and brioche. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and complex, with excellent mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is already very enjoyable to drink today, but should age long and gracefully and deserves a few more years of hibernation before having at it in earnest. 2020-2045+. **93.**

2002 Krug “Clos du Mesnil” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims) ID #415068

I have been waiting the release of the 2002 Clos du Mesnil bottling from Krug since soon after the quality of this exceptional vintage was confirmed. Like all wines from the house of Krug, patience has been required, as the team here is not about to let a legend out of the cellars until it has had its proper and relaxed *elevage*, but at age fifteen, the wait is over and this monument to this great and unique *terroir* is now hitting the market. The wine aged thirteen years *sur latte* in the Krug cellars in Reims, prior to disgorgement in the winter of 2015. The wine offers up a deep, pure and youthful bouquet of fresh apricot, pear, a marvelously complex base of chalky soil tones, hints of the *crème patissière* to come, a dollop of fresh nutmeg and a nice touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamless, with the inherent power of the 2002 vintage very much in evidence in its bottomless core, but with the overall profile of the wine one of unrepentant refinement. As stunningly beautiful as the fruit component is here, the wine is more defined by its brilliant mineral drive on the palate, with its elegant *mousse*, perfect balance and very, very long, nascently complex and laser-like finish the stuff of legends. The wine seems to attain its lift and backend energy from its limestone mineral drive, rather than the bright, zesty acidity and the overall impression is of almost otherworldly perfection. I have been fortunate to taste every single vintage of Clos du Mesnil since the inaugural vintage of 1979, but the 2002 is the finest I have ever come across in the first blush of youth. It will live for more than half a century and really deserves many more years in the cellar to allow it to completely blossom, but it is going to be no easy task to defer gratification, as the wine is pure magic already! 2025-2085+. **100.**

2002 Tarlant “la Vigne d’Antan” Non-Greffée Chardonnay Brut Nature (Oeuilly)

The vintage dating for the Vigne d’Antan bottling appears on the back label, rather than on the front. In the past, I have listed this bottling as non-vintage, but it seems rather absurd to do

so, since it is clearly a vintage-dated bottling on the back label. I last tasted this wine during my visit to the estate back in the spring of 2015 and it has blossomed beautifully over the ensuing couple of years. The bouquet now shows some lovely secondary layering in its constellation of baked apples and pears, hazelnut, beautifully complex soil tones, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, elegant *mousse*, excellent acidity and a long, nutty and vibrant finish. Readers may recall that this is an old vine cuvée that is produced from a parcel planted on its original French rootstock on a base of sandy soil. This is getting nicely vinous as it ages and is really at a beautiful point in its evolution, though may still have another layer to share with further bottle age. 2017-2035. **93+**.



1996 Corbon “Grand Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize) Disgorged February 2015

The Corbon family holds back a portion of their vintage-dated wine for fully twenty years prior to release, with the most recent year to issue from the cellars their stellar 1996 bottling. This is absolutely stunning juice and one of the finest vintages from the *maison* that I have had the pleasure to taste. The bouquet is deep, pure and flat out gorgeous today, soaring from the glass in a classic constellation of pear, delicious apple, almond, chalky soil tones, brioche and plenty of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with great focus and grip, lovely mid-palate intensity, vibrant acids and laser-like focus on the very long, complex and utterly refined finish. At age twenty-one, this Champagne is just starting to really stretch its wings and soar! 2017-2050. **94+**.

1990 Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

So many 1990 Champagne bottlings are now getting a bit long in the tooth, as this very ripe vintage has not really stood the test of time as well as seemed probable in its early days. Happily, this superb '90 Blanc de Blancs from Billecart-Salmon is an exception, as the wine continues to drink with lovely vibrancy and bounce and shows no lack of freshness at age twenty-seven. The deep, complex and properly mature bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of backed apples and peaches, walnuts, superb soil tones, lovely smokiness and a gentle topnote of butterscotch. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and fully mature, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and still impressive backend mineral drive on the long, nicely balanced and complex finish. The backend energy here remains impressive and this wine still has many, many years of excellent drinking ahead of it. 2017-2035+. **93.**

1966 Billecart-Salmon “Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 1966 Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs is cruising along beautifully at age fifty-one and fully underscores how ageworthy these great vintage-dated Champagne bottlings can be, if well-stored from the outset. This particular bottle came from a very cold, English cellar and was hand-carried over to New York for our tasting in the spring. The bouquet is superb, offering up a mature and zesty bouquet of apricot, nutskin, chalky minerality, orange peel and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite crisp, with beautiful focus and balance, a nice touch of remaining *mousse* and a very long, complex and utterly refined finish. This lovely old bubbly still has plenty of life in it! 2017-2035. **92.**

Vintage-Dated Brut, Extra Brut and Brut Nature

2012 Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Magnum (Cumières) Disgorged June 2016

This is the first time I have seen a vintage-dated bottling of Cumières from Vincent Laval, which he produced from a single *lieu à dit* in the village and only released in magnums. This wine spent three and half years aging on its fine lees and is the customary Laval “Cumières” blend of forty percent chardonnay and thirty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is superb, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of white peach, apple, *patissière*, complex minerality, gentle smokiness and the delicate floral tones in the upper register from first class pinot meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in profile, but with its future complexity already written in stone. The core is rock solid, the *mousse* very elegant and the wine has exquisite focus and grip on the very long, very classic finish. This is already an outstanding drink, but its best days are still ahead of it! 2017-2060. **93+.**

2012 Georges Laval “Hautes Chèvres” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Cumières) Disg: 9/16

The 2012 les Hautes Chèvres is the first vintage of this Blanc de Noirs, single vineyard wine to be made entirely from pinot meunier, rather than pinot noir. As readers may recall from my report on my visit to the winery back in the spring of 2015, Vincent Laval finally had to replant the section of the vineyard of les Hautes Chèvres planted with his oldest pinot noir vines (*circa* 1930), so he has switched the foundation of this bottling to his next oldest parcel of vines in the *lieu à dit*, which happen to be pinot meunier ranging from fifty-three to eighty-two years of age. The first pinot meunier-based bottling of les Hautes Chèvres from Monsieur Laval is flat out stunning, delivering a superb aromatic constellation of apple, white peach, a superb base of chalky soil tones, gentle nuttiness, *patissière* and incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and just exuding pinot meunier elegance, with a superb core, very refined *mousse*, vibrant acids and great focus and balance on the very, very

long and complex finish. A great wine, the 2012 les Hautes Chèvres really will need at least five years in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layers of complexity to start to emerge from behind its superb structural chassis. 2022-2060+. **95+**.

2012 Taittinger Brut Millésimé (Reims)

The 2012 Taittinger Brut Millésimé is composed of an unspecified blend of chardonnay and pinot noir (both the *maison's* website and the technical sheets supplied with my samples fail to breakdown the percentages of the two grapes). The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, warm bread and a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still very young, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and fine backend mineral drive on the long, primary and promising finish. This has just been released and is still a puppy, but with some bottle age, it should prove to be an excellent vintage *chez* Taittinger. 2020-2050. **92**.

2011 Marguet Père et Fils “les Crayères” Extra Brut (Ambonnay) Disgorged March 2016

Apparently, this was the first time I had tasted the 2011 single vineyard bottling of les Crayères from Benoît Marguet (as I could not find it listed in my database), though I could have sworn I had tasted it previously! In any case, this is a blend of fifty-seven percent pinot noir and forty-three percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* entirely barrel-fermented and the wine spent just under four years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in the spring of last year. It is the first non-*dosé* vintage release of les Crayères from Benoît. The wine is flat out brilliant and the finest single example of this vintage that I have had a chance to yet taste, soaring from the glass in a vibrant blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, very complex minerality, gentle smokiness and just a whisper of buttery oak in the upper limits. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with beautiful balance, utterly refined *mousse*, great focus and grip and a very, very long, zesty and laser-like finish. A stunning wine! 2017-2040. **95**.

2010 Champagne Marguet “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Millésime Disgorged November 2016

The Ambonnay bottling from Benoît Marguet is the first release of his *Terroir* Series from his own grapes (he had previously produced a 2010 Mesnil bottling for example from purchased grapes from one of his friends in that village) and this will constitute his top of the line, blended vintage bottlings from domaine-grown fruit from here on out (as opposed to his single vineyard wines). I tasted this last summer and it has blossomed beautifully with another year of bottle age. The 2010 Ambonnay is produced from a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, saw extended *elevage* until June of 2011 in casks prior to bottling, was aged five and a half years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine is flat out stunning, soaring from the glass in a refined constellation of peach, apple, *patissière*, very complex soil tones, just a whisper of leesy complexity and a very faint base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, frothy *mousse* and outstanding cut and grip on the very, very long and complex finish. This is a brilliant young Champagne! 2017-2045. **94**.

2010 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Partition” Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry) Disgorged Feb. 2016

The 2010 Cuvée Partition from Jean-Marc Sélèque is composed of a blend of seventy-two percent chardonnay, fourteen percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir and was finished off with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The *vins clairs* for this cuvée are all barrel-fermented in older casks. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pear, apple, *crème patissière*, fresh almond, just a whisper of oak influence and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure,

full and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and balance and a very long, zesty and still youthful finish. This could do with a bit of bottle age to really blossom, but for those without the requisite patience, it is already pretty tasty. 2019-2035+. **92+**.



2009 Champagne Gronget “Special Club” Brut Millésime (Étoges) Disgorged Feb. 2015

The 2009 Champagne Gronget “Special Club” bottling is comprised of a blend of forty-eight percent chardonnay, thirty-four percent pinot noir and eighteen percent pinot meunier, with the *vins clairs* of the latter two fermented in stainless steel tank and undergoing malo. The chardonnay was fermented in aged *foudres* and did not undergo malolactic fermentation. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter, after having aged *sur latte* for five years. The 2009 is a fine follow-up to the exceptional 2008 version, offering up a ripe and classy nose of white peach, apple, a touch of fresh nutmeg, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones and a touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite broad-shouldered for this cuvée, with fine mineral drive, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and impressive length and grip on the complex and fairly powerful finish. The vintage’s personality comes through loud and clear here, but the wine retains lovely Côte de Blancs cut and lift on the backend as well. A lovely wine. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2009 Lamiable “Cuvée Héliades” Grand Cru Brut Millésime (Tours-sur-Marne)

I last tasted the 2009 Cuvée Héliades from Lamiable back in the summer of 2013, so I was very pleased to see another bottle of this lovely wine gracing my range of samples from the

house in Tours-sur-Marne. The wine is a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and twenty percent pinot noir, with the grapes hailing from a vineyard planted in 1953. Interestingly, the chardonnay is all barrel-fermented and the pinot noir is fermented in tank. The wine only spent three years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, which was the reason I was able to taste it back in 2013, and has had four years' worth of bottle age now and is drinking very well today. The bouquet is starting to show a touch of secondary complexity in its mélange of apple, peach, warm biscuits, a touch of nuttiness, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is really drinking with style today, but has the structure to cruise along in bottle with aplomb for decades to come. Fine, fine juice. 2017-2035+. **92+**.

2009 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime (Reims)

As I mentioned last year, the *cépages* of the 2009 Louis Roederer Brut Millésime is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay and the wine was aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. Eighteen percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented for this cuvée and the wine did not undergo malolactic fermentation. I last tasted this fine bottle late last fall and the wine has continued to blossom very nicely since that time. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a ripe and classy blend of peach, apple, brioche, fresh almond, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with a wide open and zesty personality, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, classy and exuberant finish. The sunny summer of 2009 has made this wine a charmer right out of the blocks and the wine is already drinking at its apogee, though with the balance to also age very nicely over the next fifteen to twenty years. But, that said, this is really a nice moment to be drinking this vintage from Louis Roederer! 2017-2040. **92+**.

2009 Louis Roederer Brut Nature (Reims)

The second release of Louis Roederer's Brut Nature hails from 2009 vintage and came entirely from the estate's vineyards in the village of Cumières. The wine is a blend of one-third chardonnay and two-thirds pinot noir and pinot meunier, with twenty-five percent of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented. The wines did not undergo malolactic fermentation this year and were aged more than five years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a fine nose of white peach, apple, *patissière*, complex soil tones and the gentle floral topnote of meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and racy, with a rock solid core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, brisk acids and impressive backend minerality on the long, complex finish. The ripeness of the year is nicely presented here, but within a harness of minerality and bright acidity that allows the wine to shower the palate with generosity, without ever losing cut and grip. Fine juice. 2017-2040. **93**.

2008 Bruno Paillard "Assemblage" Extra Brut Millésime (Reims) Disgorged March 2015

The 2008 Bruno Paillard "Assemblage" is comprised of a blend of forty-two percent chardonnay, forty-two percent pinot noir and sixteen percent pinot meunier, with the wine having spent six years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in the spring of 2015. The *dosage* is five grams per liter. The wine is absolutely exquisite on the nose, offering up a complex constellation of apple, tangerine, a very complex base of soil, fresh-baked bread, a hint of the nuttiness to come with bottle age and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full and pure, with a superb core, brisk, perfectly-integrated acids, refined *mousse* and great focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and beautifully balanced finish. Fine juice that is

eminently approachable today, but really deserves another five to seven years in the cellar. 2017-2050. **94.**

2008 Pol Roger Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2008 Pol Roger Brut Millésime is a beautiful wine in the making, with the depth and structure to carry it far into the future, but also a wine that is strongly deserving of at least another five years in the cellar to truly blossom. The wine is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with all of the fruit hailing from grand cru villages on the Montagne de Reims and Côte des Blancs. The wine spent eight years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, but Pol Roger does not give information of the date of disgorgement or the finishing *dosage*. The bouquet on the wine is terrific, offering up a very complex blend of apple, white peach, a touch of fresh nutmeg, brioche, smoke, dried flowers and superb minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and absolutely rock solid at the core, with refined *mousse*, impeccable focus and balance, and impressive grip on the long and zesty finish. This is already easy to drink, but it is still a puppy and I would try to not touch a bottle for another five years. 2022-2055+. **94.**

2007 Bollinger “la Grande Année” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

Disgorged September 2016

The newly released 2007 Bollinger “la Grande Année” is composed of a blend of pinot noir (almost entirely from Aÿ and Verzenay) and thirty percent chardonnay (Cramant and Oger), with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented. The wine was aged more than eight years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of peach, gentle hazelnut tones, warm bread, dried flowers, a marvelous base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, impeccably balanced finish. This is really drinking well out of the blocks, but has the structure to also age very nicely. Fine juice. 2017-2040. **93.**

2007 Dehours et Fils “Brisefer” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-le-Port) Disg: Dec. 2015

The 2007 Brisefer single vineyard bottling from Jérôme Dehours is a superb follow-up to the very good 2005 I tasted a year ago. This is entirely chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented in older casks and the wine sees no *dosage*. The 2007 jumps from the glass in a fine constellation of pear, delicious apple, a touch of toasted almond, pastry cream, excellent soil tones and just a hint of buttery oak from the older barrels. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and electric on the palate, with a rock solid core, great soil signature, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the impeccably balanced and complex finish. This wine has personality to burn already and is still a young wine, with even better things to come with some extended bottle age! There are only seventeen hundred bottles of this wine produced, so do not waste any time looking to put a few in the cellar! 2017-2045+. **94+.**

2007 Marguet Père et Fils “Sapience” Extra Brut (Non-Dosé)

It had been two years since I last tasted the beautiful 2007 vintage of Sapience from Benoît Marguet. This is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot meunier and pinot noir. As I have mentioned in the past, the chardonnay comes from David Léclapart, the pinot meunier from Vincent Laval and the pinot noir from Benoît Lahaye (as this is a completely organic cuvée and the Marguet vineyards were not yet certified organic in 2007). The 2007 Sapience is still quite youthful in personality, but has started to blossom nicely since I last had a bottle, wafting from the glass in a very refined blend of apple, white peach, stony minerality, beautiful meunier floral tones, *patissière*, a discreetly smoky topnote and an exotic

touch of lavender in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and nascently complex, with excellent mid-palate intensity, elegant *mousse*, superb focus and grip and a very, very long and snappy finish. This is still early days for this wine, but it is getting closer to its plateau of maturity and is going to be very long-lived and very, very special for a long time to come. 2020-2060. **95.**

2007 Philipponnat “1522” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) Disgorged May 2016

The 2007 Philipponnat “1522” Brut Millésime is comprised of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay, with all of the fruit hailing from grand cru vineyards. The wine spent nearly eight full years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement and was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up superb depth and complexity on the nose, with scents of apple, white peach, discreet nuttiness, complex soil tones, warm biscuits and a gently smoky topnote jumping from the glass. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite zesty, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, and impressive focus and grip on the complex and still fairly youthful finish. This is a fine drink today and will be even better with a bit more bottle age. 2017-2040. **92+.**

2007 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2007 vintage of Clos des Goisses is absolutely superb and is already showing plenty of secondary layering of complexity in its outstanding bouquet of peach, apple, *patissière*, a very complex base of soil tones, incipient nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and sports simply outstanding depth in the core, with refined *mousse*, bright acids and great cut and grip on the very long finish. This is already a very easy wine to drink today, but I would try to exercise a modicum of patience and give it just a few more years’ worth of bottle age to allow the palate to catch up with the lovely development already showing in the bouquet. 2020-2060+. **95.**

2006 Le Brun Servenay “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes Brut Millésime (Avize)

I last tasted the 2006 Le Brun Servenay “Exhilerante” Vieilles Vignes bottling two years ago, where the wine showed very “leesy” in personality, with the fruit a bit submerged and this kept the score down a bit. Two years on, the eight years this wine spent aging *sur latte* can still be felt in its more leesy character, but there is a lot more fruit showing today, as the wine offers up a complex nose of pear, a touch of tangerine, fresh almond, warm bread, chalky soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a blend of eighty percent chardonnay and ten percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with a finishing *dosage* of four grams per liter. To my palate, this is still a touch too leesy for its own good, taking away a bit of potential elegance, but I like this bottle better than the one two years ago. 2017-2035. **89.**

2006 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “les Cintres” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2006 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “les Cintres” is a new Blanc de Noirs bottling produced from three of the warmest *lieux à dits* in the heart of the Clos des Goisses vineyard. This is the very first vintage it has been produced and the wine will not be made in every vintage, but only in those years where Charles Philipponnat and his *Chef de Cave*, Thierry Garnier, that the Clos des Goisses bottling can spare a bit of pinot noir for this unique expression of the limestone hillside as a Blanc de Noirs. Given the riper style of the 2006 vintage in Champagne, as well as this wine hailing from the three warmest parcels in the Clos, I was expecting a rather muscular expression of bubbly, but this is most emphatically not the case with this stunning

inaugural release of les Cintres! The bouquet is vibrant and beautifully precise, delivering scents of tangerine, white peach, fresh-baked bread, lovely, discreet smokiness, chalky soil tones and just a hint of vanillin oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully mineral in personality, with a lovely core that exudes a touch of creaminess, bright acids, pinpoint bubbles and impeccable focus and grip on the very long and complex finish. This is a very, very exciting new addition to the Clos des Goisses family at Philipponnat! 2017-2050. **95.**

2006 Pol Roger Brut Millésime (Épernay)

It had been six months since I last opened a bottle of the 2006 Pol Roger Brut Millésime, and the wine was virtually unchanged from the last example, which I took as a very good sign, given the generally quite forward nature of the 2006 vintage in Champagne. The bouquet is refined, complex and wide open, offering up scents of apple, rye toast, plenty of smokiness, a lovely base of soil, orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, ready to drink finish. As I noted back in September of last year, this wine is at its apogee today and drinking with plenty of style. As readers may recall, the '06 is comprised of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay and spent nine years on its fine lees. 2017-2030. **92.**

2005 Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Millésime (Ludes)

The 2005 Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Millésime is a blend of one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, nicely developed and complex, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of apple, warm bread, orange, refined soil tones, lovely smokiness and a gentle topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Many 2005s can be just a touch broad-shouldered in personality, but this is not the case with this excellent wine. 2017-2040. **93.**

2004 Henri Giraud “Argonne” Grand Cru Brut (Aÿ)

The 2004 Argonne from Henri Giraud is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel fermented and aged twelve months in cask prior to bottling, with thirty percent of the barrels being new. The wine spends ten years aging *sur latte* and is finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is pure, complex and nicely tertiary in its constellation of apple, peach, hazelnuts, beautifully refined soil tones, *patissière* and a gentle base of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and extremely refined in profile, with lovely mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, impeccable focus and grip and a very, very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. 2017-2040+. **96.**

2003 Champagne Tarlant “la Vigne d’Or” Blanc de Meunier Brut Nature Disg: Feb. 2013

As readers may recall, the la Vigne d’Or cuvée from Champagne Tarlant is composed entirely of old vine pinot meunier from the vineyard of Pierre de Bellevue in the village of Oeuilly, which was planted in 1947. Each bottling is a single vintage, though this does only appears on the back label, with this particular release from 2003. It has so far only been produced in four vintages: 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2004, and it was the 2004 version that I tasted during my

visit to the estate back in the spring of 2015, so this was my first taste of the 2003 la Vigne d'Or. The wine offers up a superb nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, white peach, warm bread, complex soil tones, a hint of honeysuckle, gentle smokiness and a myriad of other, gentle meunier floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, but also impressively brisk, with a superb core and soil signature, elegant *mousse*, a lovely girdle of acidity and impressive length and grip on the complex finish. This is excellent wine that is already drinking very well indeed, but which will continue to age gracefully for many years to come. 2017-2035. **92+**.

2003 Champagne Tarlant “la Vigne Royale” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Disg: June 2014

The La Vigne Royale bottling from Benoit Tarlant does not carry its vintage date on the front label, but is clearly stated on the back one, so I have listed it as a vintage-dated wine this time around. As readers may recall, this wine is made entirely from pinot noir planted in a very steep vineyard in the village of Celles-lès-Condé, next door to Oeuilly. I have loved this wine since the first time that I tasted it three or four years ago, but this most recent bottle was showing a bit of the 2003 vintage character and seemed to have moved forward quite a bit since the example I tasted a year ago. The bouquet is now showing plenty of mature nuttiness in its bouquet of walnuts, peach, freshly-baked bread, complex soil tones and a touch of upper register honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and soil-driven in personality, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. It is possible that I just had a slightly forward bottle, but my gut instinct is that this wine is starting to show some of its vintage character and will be best drunk up over a shorter timeframe than I initially anticipated. 2017-2030. **92**.

2003 Champagne Tarlant “la Matinale” Brut Nature (Oeuilly) Disgorged July 2014

The 2003 la Matinale from Champagne Tarlant continues to drink beautifully and at age fourteen is now fully into its apogee of peak maturity. The wine's *cépages* is forty-five percent pinot noir, twenty-seven percent pinot meunier and twenty-eight percent chardonnay, with Benoit Tarlant deciding to block the malolactic fermentation in this vintage to keep a good spine of acidity for the wine to age upon. The bouquet offers up a fine constellation of white peach, apple, impressive minerality, wheat toast, gentle nuttiness and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and refined, with very good focus and balance, impressive mid-palate depth, elegant *mousse*, sound framing acids and a long, complex and nicely mature finish. The 2003 Tarlant la Matinale is now firmly into its plateau of maturity and is drinking with plenty of style and grace. 2017-2030. **92**.

2002 Bollinger “Vieilles Vignes Françaises” Blanc de Noirs Brut (Aÿ)

The 2002 Bollinger “Vieilles Vignes Françaises” is drinking beautifully today and at age fifteen, is probably in its prime of life. The bouquet offers up a superb and nicely lifted blend of white cherries, peach, *patissière*, a superb base of minerality, dried flowers and a dollop of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a great core of ripe fruit, refined *mousse* and a very, very long, complex and zesty finish. In some vintages, the Vieilles Vignes Françaises can be a bit heavier in style, as these great old, ungrafted vines tend to ripen better than grafted vines, but the bounce of the 2002 vintage has created a perfect synthesis of the richness of this bottling and the zest of the year. A marvelous bottle. 2017-2035+. **95**.

2002 Jacques Defrance Brut Millésime (les Riceys)

The 2002 Jacques Defrance Brut Millésime was aged a minimum of five years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a lovely bouquet that is transitioning nicely into the additional complexity of maturity, delivering scents of apple, warm bread, a touch of walnut, dried flowers and a complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and frothy, with a good core, fine focus and balance and good length on the fairly complex finish. This is a bit more high-toned stylistically than I might have expected from the ripe 2002 vintage, but it is a good, solid example of the vintage that is just entering its plateau of peak maturity and has plenty of years still ahead of it. Not bad, but the wines the house is producing these days are a step up from this bottling. 2017-2035. **88.**

2002 Gosset “Cuvée Celebris” Extra Brut Millésime (Épernay)

The 2002 Gosset “Cuvée Celebris” continues to open up beautifully as it evolves with bottle age, and if anything, the wine is even finer today than was the case when I last tasted it a year ago. As readers may recall, this vintage of Celebris is a blend of fifty-two percent chardonnay and forty-eight percent pinot noir and was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine is starting to show beautiful secondary layers of complexity on both the nose and palate at age fifteen, wafting from the glass in a complex constellation of apple, a touch of fresh apricot, brioche, complex, chalky minerality, almond, gentle smokiness and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with excellent focus and balance, plenty of concentration at the core, very refined *mousse* and a long, elegant and utterly suave finish. The 2002 Celebris has now entered its plateau of peak maturity, but will continue to cruise along with grace for at least another twenty-five years in bottle. Superb wine. 2017-2040+. **95.**

2002 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims)

ID#415064

It has been about a year and a half since I last tasted the brilliant 2002 Krug and time has seemingly not moved for this perfect wine since that time. It remains a very young and magical wine whose true apogee is still a decade or two in the future, but the wine is so beautifully balanced in this vintage that it is an absolute joy to drink it in its youth! The wine soars from the glass in a youthfully complex blend of white peach, apple, a nice touch of nuttiness, great minerality, *patissière*, Krug smokiness and a very discreet topnote of spices that recall nutmeg. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and utterly refined, with a rock solid core, bright, perfectly-integrated acids, laser-like focus, refined *mousse* and a vibrant, seamless and amazingly long finish. The beautiful fruit of 2002 is so beautifully weaved into a mosaic of minerality on the palate that this wine will be pure perfection to drink when it has reached its zenith, where it will remain for decades. A wine of pure genius. 2025-2100. **100.**

2000 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2000 vintage of Clos des Goisses is now wide open and ready for primetime drinking. The bouquet is complex and very beautiful in its presentation of apple, peach, caraway seed, refined soil tones, rye toast and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and generous on the attack, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, focused finish of impressive grip and bounce. As readers will recall, 2000 is a ripe year in Champagne and the Clos des Goisses, like so many examples from this vintage, as had come forward more briskly than in many years, so the wine is now fully into its apogee at age seventeen. 2017-2040. **94+.**



2000 Ployez-Jacquemart “Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut (Ludes)

The 2000 vintage of Ployez-Jacquemart’s Tête de Cuvée is composed of its customary blend of two-thirds chardonnay and equal amounts of pinot noir and pinot meunier to make up the balance, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented, do not go through malo and the wine is finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. It was aged at least ten years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The very complex bouquet of the 2000 Liesse wafts from the glass in a refined constellation of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of nuttiness, lovely soil tones, incipient smokiness and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and complex, with an excellent core of fruit, superb soil signature, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a very long, bright and well-balanced finish. This is starting to drink with great breed, but will continue to cruise along for decades to come. 2017-2040+. **94+**.

1982 Krug Brut Millésime (Reims) Served from Magnum

This particular magnum of the beautiful 1982 Krug was an original release, rather the Krug Collection series, and it was interesting to compare notes between this and the Collection magnum of the ’82 I drank back at the end of 2015. The wine in its original guise is beautifully mature today, wafting from the glass in a complex and nicely tertiary blend of apple, peach, *patissière*, caraway seed, complex soil tones and a topnote of hazelnut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still impressively vibrant, with a superb core, great complexity, refined *mousse* and excellent backend mineral drive on the long, zesty and absolutely *à point* finish. This

is at a different stage of its evolutionary arc than the Krug Collection 1982, but every bit as magical in its own right. 2017-2050. **96.**

1982 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 1982 vintage of Clos des Goisses is really superb and has moved into its nutty phase of peak maturity. The bouquet offers up a lovely and quite tertiary blend of peach, fallen apple, *patissière*, walnuts, complex soil tones and that signature smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a good core, fine, vibrant acids and a very long, bright and fully mature finish. Interestingly, this bottle, which was paired up with the 2000 above, showed more cut and grip than the riper vintage of 2000, despite being eighteen years its senior. A lovely vintage of Clos des Goisses, the 1982 has reached a stage in its evolution where I really love to drink the wine, as the nuttiness and smokiness of this cuvée at full maturity is still coupled with a bright, zesty palate impression. Lovely juice. 2017-2035. **95.**

Vintage-Dated Rosé

2011 Champagne Marguet “Ambonnay” Extra Brut Rosé Millésime Disg: September 2016

The 2011 Ambonnay Rosé bottling from Benoît Marguet is the first release of his *Terroir* Series in a Rosé from his own grapes, and the wine is magical. Interestingly, Monsieur Marguet works on his blends for his Rosé bottlings without seeing the wines, relying solely on bouquet and taste of the *vins clairs*, so that he will not be influenced by the color of the cuvée, but only by its aromatic and flavor harmony. The *cépages* here is sixty-five percent chardonnay and thirty-five percent pinot noir, with the wine spending just over five years aging on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The bouquet soars from the glass in a refined and vibrant mix of tangerine, white cherries, complex soil tones, rye toast and a very gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full, crisp and stunningly balanced, with lovely mid-palate depth, great focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the complex and zesty finish. Great juice! 2017-2040. **93+.**

2011 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Vintage (Reims)

The 2011 Louis Roederer Brut Rosé Vintage is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay, with a quarter of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented. The wine spent four-plus years aging *sur latte* and was disgorged in 2016. Given that pinot noir here comes from the sun-bowl of Cumières, the moderate ripeness of the vintage is nicely offset in this wine, which is one of the strongest examples of the vintage that I have tasted. The wine is its customary very pale salmon color and offers up a really lovely bouquet of peach, a touch of strawberry, gentle spice tones, orange zest, a complex base of soil and gentle hints of the smokiness that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full and complex, with a lovely core, a great sense of elegance out of the blocks, refined *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the seamlessly balanced finish. A superb bottle in the making and a transcendental 2011! 2017-2040. **92+.**

2008 Pol Roger Brut Rosé (Épernay)

The 2008 Pol Roger Brut Rosé is a beautiful bottle that has started to blossom very nicely since I last tasted it. The *cépages* of the '08 Rosé blends sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, with fifteen percent of the pinot noir being still red wine. The wine ages seven years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrant offering up scents of tangerine, cherries, lovely spice tones, warm biscuits, blossoming smokiness and a truly beautiful base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is focused, full and very pure on the

attack, with excellent mid-palate depth, refined *mousse*, bright, seamless acids and a very long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Great juice that is starting to blossom beautifully and will continue to age long and gracefully. I would still try to give it another year or two in the cellar to allow its secondary layers to emerge fully, but it is not going to be easy keeping one's hands off of this superb bottle! 2018-2035+. **93.**

2008 Veuve Clicquot “Vintage Rosé” Brut (Reims)

It had been a bit more than a year since I last tasted the 2008 Veuve Clicquot Vintage Brut Rosé and the wine continues to show very nicely. As readers may recall, this is the exact same wine as the regular 2008 vintage, but with fourteen percent still pinot noir included in the *cépages* of sixty-one percent pinot noir, thirty-five percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. This is the first vintage at Clicquot to include a percentage of *vins clairs* that were barrel-fermented since the 1970s. The 2008 Rosé offers up a fine and precise bouquet of cherries, a touch of blood orange, a fine base of soil, gentle spice tones, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, bright acids, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This has lost a touch of the vibrancy it showed last spring and is not aging quite as well as I had hoped, but it remains a very well-made wine that is a notable step up in quality from the last vintage-dated Rosé that I tasted from the house. That said, I did overrate this just a touch a year ago. 2017-2030+. **92.**

2006 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2006 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” is absolutely stellar and drinking with great distinction at this point in its evolution. The composition on the '06 is nearly the same as the 2005, with the blend being comprised of sixty-three percent pinot noir and thirty-seven percent chardonnay. Forty percent of the *vins clairs* were barrel-fermented for the 2006 and the wine was finished with 4.5 grams per liter *dosage*. This vintage of Juste Rosé has a lovely vinous quality to it, but is also very ethereal and light on its feet, which is not often the case with Champagne that I would call “vinous” in style. The beautiful bouquet jumps from the glass in a blend of peach, white cherry, complex minerality, rye bread, a whisper of rhubarb and a lovely, discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a lovely core, impeccable focus and grip, refined, delicate *mousse* and outstanding balance on the long, vibrant and complex finish. This is a bit ahead of the 2005 in its evolutionary curve and is drinking with great distinction today. 2017-2035. **95.**

2005 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2005 Juste Rosé bottling from the Clos des Goisses is a beautiful, youthful wine. The *cépages* of this vintage is sixty-four percent pinot noir and thirty-six percent chardonnay, with half of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and none of the base wines undergoing malolactic fermentation. The *dosage* here is quite low, at 4.25 grams per liter. The superbly complex nose wafts from the glass in an almost saline blend of orange peel, peach, smoke, a touch of new leather and a lovely base of salty minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and gorgeously light on its feet, with great purity and focus, a great core of fruit, very elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the bright and dancing finish. Just a beautiful bottle that is drinking with generosity already, but has decades of life ahead of it. 2017-2040+. **94+.**

WINES FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE



The fine Corbières estate of Château Montfin, nestled into the hills of the Languedoc.

This article really came about by serendipity, as I was invited to a fine vertical of the most famous estate in the Languedoc, Mas de Daumas Gassac, back in the spring, but as it was only a few days after my knee surgery, I was unable to attend. The domaine's importer took pity on my lack of mobility and sent me several bottles from the estate after the tasting, which got me thinking that I really should have at least a few more wines from the south of France in the article, as I did not have enough different bottlings from Mas de Daumas Gassac to make up a feature on the estate. Back in my early wine merchant days, I knew the wines of the Languedoc and the surrounding appellations of the south pretty well, as the first vintage I ever sold of Mas de Daumas Gassac and nearby Domaine de Trevallon were the 1985s, but that was a long time ago now and I had really lost track of what has been going on in this beautiful corner of France. My greatest fear prior to settling in to taste through a number of wines from the region was that the wines from some of these lovely appellations, such as Corbières, Pic Saint-Loup, Saint-Chinian, Roussillon and the like would have followed the lead of the wines of the southern Rhône and opted for the higher octane, more overripe style so sadly prevalent in this era of global warming. The prospect of launching into forty or fifty wines at fourteen and a half or fifteen percent alcohol is not at all appealing to me, so I was not really looking forward to getting started on the wines, if they had indeed moved off in a stylistic direction anathema to what I prize in wine. Happily, though I did hit a few of these types of wines over the course of the several weeks I worked through these wines from the south, they were the exceptions, rather than

the rule, and the tastings in general were really quite enjoyable and it was nice to get a bit of a feel for what is passing in these appellations today.

Of the wines I sampled in preparation for this report, other than Mas de Daumas Gassac in the Languedoc, probably the most famous estate that I worked through a range of wines from was Domaine Gauby in Roussillon. I was not familiar with the wines from the Gauby family prior to receiving the samples, but the importer kindly sent me a nice, wide range of bottlings and vintages and the wines were indeed all excellent. Doing a bit of research, after being impressed with what was in my glass uncovered the fact that I had been living under a rock in regards to the wines from the Roussillon and Domaine Gauby was the undisputed star of the region- deservedly so I might add- and their wines fetched pretty serious price tags throughout the world, but seemed to be very, very well-represented on all of the top merchants' lists in France. The father and son team of Gérard and Lionel Gauby currently work together at the property in Roussillon and are truly making exceptional wines, with the white wines (which do not carry the Roussillon AOC) every bit as impressive as the red wines. The reds are a varying blend of carignan, grenache, syrah and mourvèdre, with each cuvée having its own unique combination of these grapes, and they are truly excellent wines of depth, lovely balance and potential for long-term aging and I was very, very happy to be introduced to them over the last month.

However, as good as the Domaine Gauby wines were, and they were exceptional, the real revelation to me was another *vigneron* in the nearby appellation of Pic Saint-Loup, Christophe Peyrus, whose estate is called Clos Marie. And unlike the wines of Domaine Gauby, which have already been discovered and command prices that one would expect from the preeminent domaine in its appellation, the wines of Clos Marie are still relatively unknown and their prices are absolute steals! Monsieur Peyrus is very well-known to other *vignerons* around France, as over the years he has sought out people such as Nadi and Charly Foucault at Domaine Clos Rougeard and Didier Dagueneau for advice on how to maximize the potential of his various vineyards and *terroirs* in Pic Saint-Loup, and he is clearly now one of France's very finest winegrowers. He took over the family domaine of Clos Marie in 1991 and has farmed everything at the estate biodynamically since 2000. Prior to this, the farming here was already nearly organic from his father's time, so the jump to biodynamism was a logical and small step of evolution. His recipe for beautiful wines is pretty typical of so many of the other great artisan producers scattered around France, with low yields (ranging from 15 to 35 hectoliters per hectare- hardly the norm in Pic Saint-Loup!), natural farming techniques, hand-harvesting and non-interventionist winemaking in the cellars. Everything is fermented with indigenous yeasts, aging takes place in *demi-muids* and *foudres*- none of which are new wood- and bottling is done after an appropriately relaxed period of *elevage*. Christophe Peyrus now farms twenty hectares of vineyards in the hills up above Montpellier, planted on a mixture of clay and limestone soils, with plenty of old vines at his disposal. The corresponding wines are excellent, with depth, breed and elegance, nicely tempered with lower octanes than many in the region and exquisite balance for long, positive evolution in the cellar. The wines of Clos Marie are truly stunning, world class wines, and based on their current prices, this seems to be one of the great, still undiscovered gems in the world of great French wine! As the notes below will attest, I cannot recommend them highly enough!



Christophe Peyrus of Clos Marie, in his cellars in Lauret, situated just north of Montpellier.

As for the wines from Mas de Daumas Gassac, which served as the inspiration for this article, they were every bit as fine as I remember from my early days in the wine trade and were quite enjoyable to taste and made me regret my lack of mobility at the time of the vertical tasting at the end of March. Ironically, I had been invited to a vertical tasting at the property a year or two ago that was held at the property in Languedoc, but it did not coincide with my travel schedule and I was in California at the time of that particular tasting. When a second chance to work through many of the older vintages was offered, I was very excited, but the timing made it impossible once again to attend. Maybe one day my luck will change! In any case, the four wines that I had a chance to try from Mas de Daumas Gassac were excellent, with the reds classically structured and built for the cellar (much as I remembered them), being a combination of primarily cabernet sauvignon, augmented by Bordeaux grapes such as merlot, cabernet franc and petit verdot, as well as a few outliers such as nebbiolo, dolcetto and pinot noir. The wines are nicely balanced and structured for long-term aging, so it would have been great to have the chance to taste a range of mature vintages. The white wine from the estate, which I tasted from the 2015 vintage, was even better than I recall from the old days, with a degree of refinement and balance that seemed a step up from the more buxom white wines I remember from the early 1990s here. It is composed of an exotic and quite unique *cépages* of petit manseng, viognier, chenin blanc and chardonnay. Based on the excellent quality of the 2015 Blanc, it seems likely that this too is a cuvée that will age very well over the long-term from Mas de Daumas Gassac.

The following wines are listed roughly in geographic terms, ranging from the west to the east and north to south. Wines that do not fall within any of the appellations of the region are

listed under the wider umbrella of “Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes”. Within each geographic region, the wines are listed chronologically from youngest to oldest, and alphabetically within each vintage category. I have listed the white wines, red wines and rosé bottlings all together in each vintage and appellation section. As I said above, this article was not planned, but rather just unfolded by the arrival of samples, and I am very thankful that it came about, as I tasted some truly excellent wines amongst these producers. This is definitely a region that I will pay more attention to in the future, for the notes below must only represent the tip of the iceberg in the beautiful rolling hills of the Languedoc and there must be dozens of other top estates here that I have yet to experience. But, if you would take my advice, start out your search with the wines from Clos Marie and Christophe Peyrus in Pic Saint-Loup, as given their sheer brilliance, they cannot remain as inexpensive as they are today forever and will one day be much pricier than they are now!

Languedoc AOC

2016 Picpoul de Pinet- Domaine Font-Mars (screwcap)

The de Clock family has owned this property for many generations, with Jean-Baptiste de Clock the current proprietor of Domaine Font-Mars. The grapes for his Picpoul de Pinet are picked at night to preserve acidity and freshness. The 2016 version is fresh and zesty, offering up scents of green apple, candied lime peel, salty soil tones, wild fennel and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and loaded with personality on the attack, with a lovely core, fine focus and a slightly pinched backend from the impending reduction from the screwcap. This would be dynamite wine under natural cork, but it is already starting to feel the limitations of its closure of choice on the finish, which should be very long and vibrant, like the rest of the wine. One can drink this with pleasure for the next several months, but the risk will go up of reductive deconstruction as the time goes by. The score reflects how nicely it is showing today. 2017-2018. **89.**

2015 Mas de Daumas Gassac Blanc

The 2015 Mas de Daumas Gassac Blanc is composed of a unique blend of thirty-two percent Petit Manseng, thirty percent Viognier, twenty percent Chenin Blanc and eighteen percent Chardonnay. The wine offers up a deep and perfumed nose of pear, tangerine, candied lime peel, musky floral tones, a fine base of soil and just a whisper of lanolin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and perfumed in the mouth, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip and a long, complex and zesty finish. This is really a lovely wine, albeit utterly unique in its aromatic and flavor profile. 2017-2025+. **92.**

2015 Mas de Daumas Gassac Rouge

The 2015 Mas de Daumas Gassac rouge is primarily cabernet sauvignon (seventy-nine percent), with the remainder of the blend made up of seven percent merlot, six percent cabernet franc, and two percent each of petit verdot, pinot noir, nebbiolo and dolcetto! I like the precision and ripeness shown here on the nose, as it delivers scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, tobacco leaf, dark soil tones, just a whisper of tariness (from the nebbiolo and dolcetto?), discreet cedar, hints of the lavender to come and a topnote of violets. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and youthful, with a superb core, lovely soil signature, firm, fine-grained tannins and excellent focus and grip on the nascently complex and promising finish. There is more breed here than in the very good 2014 version and this is clearly going to be a great vintage of Mas de Daumas Gassac in the fullness of time. 2025-2065. **93+.**

2014 Manon Blanc- Clos Marie (Christophe Peyrus)

Christophe Peyrus took over his family's twenty hectare estate in 1991 and the property has been farmed biodynamically since 2000. His Manon Blanc bottling is composed of a blend of twenty percent Grenache Blanc, twenty percent Grenache Gris, fifteen percent each of Roussanne, Rolle and Carignan Blanc, ten percent Clairette and five percent Muscat. The 2014 comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane and offers up a pure and complex bouquet of pear, coriander seed, salty soil tones, white flowers and a topnote of fresh almond. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still tightly-knit, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature and a very long, nascently complex and utterly refined finish. This is one of the most sophisticated and understated white wines I have tasted from the Languedoc, with the balance to age long and gracefully. Very impressive! 2017-2030+. **92+**.

2014 Mas de Daumas Gassac Rouge

The 2014 Mas de Daumas Gassac has a slightly different *cépages* than the 2015, as this vintage is composed of an exotic blend of seventy-seven cabernet sauvignon, seven percent merlot, five percent cabernet franc, three percent petit verdot and two percent each of malbec, pinot noir, nebbiolo and dolcetto! The nose shows a nice touch of smoky new oak in its mix of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, dark soil tones, a touch of *garrigue* and coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthfully reserved, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, ripe, firm tannins and very good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This needs some time in the cellar, but once it has blossomed, it will be a very good bottle. 2022-2050. **91+**.

2007 Mas de Daumas Gassac Rouge

The 2007 vintage of Mas de Daumas Gassac rouge is impressively low octane, coming in at 12.5 percent alcohol and offering up beautiful complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet shows quite a bit of old school claret character, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of cassis, cigar ash, complex soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf, but with some additional exotic overtones of wild fennel, charred wood and dried lavender. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and quite suave on the attack at age ten, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the complex finish. The backend shows some of the Mediterranean character of this wine, with a bit of road tar (perhaps from the Italian varietals included in the *cépages*?), plenty of soil signature and a touch of backend bitterness that recalls chicory. I really like this wine, which is quite unique in personality. 2017-2035+. **91**.

Corbières

2014 Gris de Gris Corbières Rosé- Château de Fontsaïnte

The 2014 Gris de Gris from Château de Fontsaïnte is a lovely wine that is made by the *saignée* method from a blend of fifty percent grenache *gris*, twenty percent grenache *noir*, twenty percent carignan and five percent each of mourvèdre and cinsault. The wine offers up a bright and stylish nose of melon, white soil tones, wild strawberries and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and nicely soil-driven in personality, with crisp acids and a nice touch of backend bitterness and a whisper of tannin on the finish. This is sealed with a plastic core, so though it was still drinking nicely when I drank it, I would not hold it too long. 2016-2017. **89**.

2014 Corbières- Domaine de Montfin

Jérôme Esteve purchased the twenty hectare estate of Château Montfin in 2002, as the property ended his search for an estate based in old vines; the vast majority of the vineyards here were planted in 1930! The vineyards are farmed organically, with some biodynamic principals now being incorporated and the fruit is all hand-harvested. This bottling sees no wood during its fermentation or *elevage*. The 2014 Corbières from Domaine de Montfin is a blend of seventy percent carignan and thirty percent grenache, with the vines all more than fifty years of age and the wine coming in at a very civilized thirteen percent octane. The bouquet is deep and classy, offering up scents of cassis, black raspberries, coffee grounds, woodsmoke, a fine base of soil and a bit of fruit skin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really solid at the core (from the estate's low yields of under thirty-five hectoliters per hectare), with a bit of ripe tannin, fine focus and grip and a long, balanced and gently pepper finish. This is a serious example of Corbières! 2017-2030+. **88+**.

2014 Corbières “Cuvée Pauline”- Château Montfin

The *cépages* for the Cuvée Pauline is a bit different than the regular Corbières rouge here, with the blend being composed of forty percent syrah, thirty percent grenache, twenty percent mourvèdre and ten percent carignan, with all raised in older casks with the exception of the grenache, which is raised in tank. This is riper than the regular bottling, coming in at 14.5 percent octane but offering up good complexity in its bouquet of sweet dark berries, espresso, hung game, dark soil tones, a touch of tree bark and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plenty ripe, with just a touch of *sur maturité* showing on the backend, but with no signs of heat or other high octane depredations. The core is plump, the finish long and modestly tannic, with good focus and grip. This is more refined in style than the regular Corbières, but to my palate, I am equally attracted to the noble rusticity of the lower octane regular cuvée. 2017-2030+. **88**.

Saint-Chinian

2015 Saint-Chinian “Antonyme”- Domaine Canet Valette

The 2015 Saint-Chinian “Antonyme” from Marc Valette is a fifty-fifty blend of cinsault and mourvèdre and is designed for early drinking, with the wine fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. The bouquet is bright and engaging, offering up scents of black cherries, pepper, a touch of tree bark, fresh herb tones, a nice touch of soil and a topnote of dried spices. On the palate the wine is medium-full, spicy and nicely transparent, with modest tannins, tangy acids and good length and grip on the gently botanical finish. This reminds me a bit of some of the wines from the Canary Islands I reviewed in the last couple of issues, as it closes with a nice touch of backend bitterness to play off the fruit tones. A good solid quaffing wine. 2017-2025. **87**.

2012 Saint-Chinian “Une et Mille Nuits”- Domaine Canet Valette

The “Une et Mille Nuits” bottling from Domaine Canet Valette is composed of a blend of forty percent syrah, thirty percent grenache, twenty percent carignan and ten percent mourvèdre. The 2012 version comes in at a ripe 14.5 percent alcohol and offers up an aromatic constellation of black raspberries, grilled meats, chocolate, *garrigue* and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a good core, a touch of overripeness and a long, moderately tannic and slightly warm finish. This is pretty good for its octane level, but it is higher in alcohol than would be ideal. 2017-2025. **87**.

Faugères

2016 Faugères Rosé “les Collines”- Domaine Ollier Taillefer

Domaine Ollier Taillefer is run by the brother and sister team of Luc and Françoise Ollier, who are the second generation of the family to run this thirty-seven hectare estate located in the high altitude village of Fos. Their higher elevation vineyards allow for cooler growing conditions and lower octane in the finished wines. Their 2016 Rosé is composed of a mix of grenache, syrah, mourvèdre and cinsault. The Olliers ferment the grapes separately, with the Rosé from the syrah and mourvèdre made by *saignée* and the other two grapes by skin contact. The wine is a pale salmon color and offers up a lovely nose of melon, a touch of white pepper, orange peel, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and succulent, with fairly modest acids, but good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is sealed with a plastic cork, so it is probably best drunk up over the coming year. 2017-2018. **88.**

2015 Faugères Blanc “Allegro”- Domaine Ollier Taillefer

The 2015 Faugères Blanc “Allegro” from Domaine Ollier Taillefer is composed of a unique blend of fifty percent Roussanne and fifty percent Vermentino, with the wine coming in at 13.5 percent octane. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of pear, limepeel, green olive, a touch of fresh rosemary and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a fine core, lovely grip and a long, focused and nascently complex finish. The acids here are quite respectable, due to the higher elevation of the vineyards and this wine should keep nicely and even improve with further bottle age. Fine juice. 2017-2024. **89.**

2014 Faugères “les Collines”- Domaine Ollier Taillefer

The 2014 Faugères “les Collines” from Domaine Ollier Taillefer is made up of a blend of syrah, grenache, carignan, mourvèdre and cinsault. The wine comes in at 13.5 percent octane and offers up a fine, youthful nose of cassis, pepper, *Garrigue*, dark soil tones and a nice touch of roasted meats in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, ripe, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is very tasty out of the blocks, but seems likely to age gracefully and will be even better with a bit of bottle age. Really good juice. 2017-2030. **90+.**

Roussillon

2015 Calcinaires- Domaine Gauby

The Calcinaires bottling from Gérard and Lionel Gauby is made from a blend of syrah, grenache, mourvèdre and carignan, with the vineyards’ ages ranging pretty widely, from eight years of age all the way up to ninety years old, all grown in the Gaubys’ home village of Calcé. The 2015 Calcinaires comes in at a very civilized thirteen percent octane and offers up a vibrant bouquet of raspberries, *garrigue*, lovely soil tones, coffee and a touch of roasted venison. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and spicy, with a plump core of fruit, a good chassis of ripe tannin and fine length and grip on the focused and nascently complex finish. This is approachable out of the blocks, albeit a bit youthfully chewy, but this fine bottle will not really come into its own until it has had three or four years in the cellar. Good juice. 2017-2030+. **89+.**

2013 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Gauby

The 2013 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Vieilles Vignes” from Domaine Gauby is a blend of grenache, carignan and mourvèdre, with the vine age ranging from forty-five to fully

one hundred and twenty years of age! The vines are planted in stony soils of marl and schist. The 2013 shows plenty of old vine depth in its aromatic constellation of cherries, black raspberries, roasted meats, coffee, cloves, stony minerality, bonfire and wild fennel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with great soil signature, impressive complexity, ripe, suave tannins and excellent length and grip on the focused and spicy finish. This too is already drinking nicely, but has room to grow and will be better with another four or five years' worth of bottle age. 2017-2035+. **92.**



The rolling hill vineyards of Domaine Gauby, with the Pyrenees in the background.

2013 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “la Foun”- Domaine Gauby

The la Foun bottling from the Gauby family is comprised entirely of old vine carignan, with these vines an ancient one hundred and twenty-plus years of age and planted before phylloxera swept through the region! Somehow, the louse did not gain any traction in the marl soils in this vineyard and the vines are still here to this day. Gérard and Lionel Gauby have made a brilliant wine from these old *Franc de Pied* vines in 2013, with the wine offering up bottomless depth in its complex bouquet of baked raspberries, bonfires, roasted venison, lavender, gorgeous soil tones and an impressive constellation of elegant spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a plush core, zesty acids, suave tannins and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, complex and beautifully balanced

finish. Like the few wines I get to taste on French rootstocks, the 2013 la Foun is noteworthy for its extra degree of elegance and soil transparency. This is a beautiful wine. 2017-2040+. **93+**.

2013 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Muntada”- Domaine Gauby

The 2013 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Muntada” from Domaine Gauby is a mix of old vine grenache, carignan and syrah, with the vines ranging from thirty years up to ninety-five years of age. The wine is put together as a barrel selection each year, selecting casks that really show well, as well as those from the oldest vines and choicest parcels. The 2013 Muntada comes in at a very civilized octane of thirteen percent and offers up a superb bouquet of baked cherries, roasted meats, *garrigue*, fine soil tones, coffee, pepper and a bit of sandalwood in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent focus and balance, ripe, chewy tannins and a very, very long, complex and classy finish. This reminds me very strongly of a great bottle of 1978 Châteauneuf du Pape in its youth! 2022-2050. **92+**.

2012 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Coume Gineste”- Domaine Gauby

The 2012 Coume Gineste Rouge from Domaine Gauby is one of their top of the line bottlings of red, with the majority of the wine comprised of very old vine grenache. The bouquet of the 2012 Coume Gineste is outstanding, offering up scents of baked raspberries and cherries, complex soil tones, *garrigue*, coffee, hung game and a gentle topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very elegant in personality, with a superb core of fruit, fine soil signature, moderate, chewy tannins and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. As this is grenache, rather than carignan, it is not quite as elegant in profile as the 2013 la Foun, but it is up there in that same exalted air of complexity. 2019-2040+. **93**.

2012 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “Muntada”- Domaine Gauby

The Muntada bottling from Gérard Gauby is a blend of syrah, grenache and carignan, with the vine age ranging from thirty to ninety-five years of age. The bouquet shows lovely syrah influence in its complex blend of black raspberries, pepper, grilled venison, *garrigue*, woodsmoke, a good base of soil tones and a touch of allspice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and chewy in personality, with excellent depth in the mid-palate, fine focus and grip and a long, moderately tannic and tangy finish. Though this is already five years of age, it could still do with a bit more bottle age to allow the sturdy backend tannins here to soften up a bit more. It will be excellent when it has a chance to shed a bit more tannin. 2020-2040. **92**.

2012 Côtes du Roussillon Villages “la Roque”- Domaine Gauby

The la Roque cuvée from the Gauby family is produced entirely from eighty year-old grenache vines, with the wine hailing from the same vineyards from which the Muntada bottling is selected. The 2012 la Roque comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and is nicely pale in color (as grenache ought to be), offering up a bright and complex bouquet of raspberries, cherries, a touch of fruitcake, beautiful spice tones (more cloves and cinnamon, rather than *garrigue*), Provençal soil tones, spiced meats and a gentle topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is pure, full and impressively transparent, with a good core, a fine impression of stony minerality, ripe, moderately chewy tannins and a long, tangy and still quite primary finish. This is still a young and slightly angular wine that needs more bottle age, but it has lovely sweet red fruit at the core and impressive soil signature and will be excellent when its blossoms. 2022-2050. **92+**.

Pic Saint-Loup

2014 Pic Saint-Loup “l’Olivette”- Clos Marie (Christophe Peyrus)

The l’Olivette bottling from Christophe Peyrus is one of his younger vine cuvées, as the most of the vineyards that contribute to this blend range from fifteen to twenty-five years of age. The *cépages* is sixty percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and ten percent mourvèdre (with this variety hailing from sixty year-old vines). The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in a combination of older *demi-muids* and *foudres*. The 2014 l’Olivette comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and offers up a fine young nose of raspberries, roasted meats, *garrigue*, pepper, a touch of green olive and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip, impressive complexity and a long, moderately tannic and beautifully balanced finish. The 2014 l’Olivette from Clos Marie is quite tasty today, but will be even better with a few years’ worth of bottle age. This reminds me very strongly of the style of wines that made Châteauneuf du Pape so popular back in the ‘70s and ‘80s, but with perhaps an extra element of breed and refinement on the palate. Superb juice. 2017-2045+. **92+**.

2014 Pic Saint-Loup “Simon”- Clos Marie (Christophe Peyrus)

The Pic Saint-Loup “Simon” bottling from Christophe Peyrus is selected from parcels further up the slope than the l’Olivette bottling, with the *cépages* here a bit more syrah-dominated, as the mix is forty-five percent each of syrah and grenache, with the remaining ten percent composed of old vine mourvèdre. The soils are different at the top of the slope here, hailing from the Jurassic period. The wine is handled similarly in the cellars, but the higher percentage of syrah and the soil variation produces a deeper, more black fruity wine than the l’Olivette. The 2014 vintage of Simon from Clos Marie is outstanding, coming in at 13.5 percent octane and delivering a marvelously complex bouquet of red and black raspberries, roasted meats, *garrigue*, chalky soil tones, a touch of olive, pepper, woodsmoke and a topnote of fresh bay leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with firm, ripe tannins, excellent focus and grip, nascent complexity and a very long, well-balanced and properly structured finish. This is remarkably complex on the nose for such a young wine, with the palate due to follow with sufficient bottle age, and this is going to be a beautiful bottle of wine with some time in the cellar! 2022-2050+. **93+**.

2013 Pic Saint-Loup “les Glorieuses”- Clos Marie (Christophe Peyrus)

Christophe Peyrus’ bottling of les Glorieuses from the 2013 vintage is simply outstanding. The wine is made from a *cépages* of half grenache and half syrah, hailing from two parcels that total 1.5 hectares between them. The soils here are a combination of limestone and quartz, with the grenache vines forty years of age and the syrah thirty years-old. The vines are cropped at thirty hectoliters per hectare for this cuvée. The bouquet of the 2013 shows marvelous grenache personality out of the blocks in its blend of black raspberries, pepper, hung game, *garrigue*, dark soil tones and a touch of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and vibrant in personality, with a fine core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the tangy, complex and seamlessly balanced finish. This is simply a terrific wine, which when first poured smelled quite a bit like Château Rayas, but which got more black fruity as it had a chance to blossom in the decanter. Fine, fine juice. 2021-2050. **93+**.

2013 Pic Saint-Loup “Simon”- Clos Marie (Christophe Peyrus)

The 2013 vintage of Christophe Peyrus’ “Simon” is also excellent, offering up a complex bouquet of cassis, black raspberries, grilled meats, *garrigue*, pepper, charred wood and lovely

soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and complex, with excellent depth at the core, ripe, seamless tannins, tangy acids and great length and grip on the focused and very serious finish. The 2013 vintage of Simon is a bit more black fruity than the fine 2014 version, which may just be the evolutionary path this cuvée customarily follows with bottle age. This is a stunning bottle of young wine that is very similar in style and quality to Jean Gonon's superb St. Josephs! 2020-2050. **93+**.

2013 Pic Saint-Loup "Métairies du Clos" V.V.- Christophe Peyrus et Françoise Julien

The Métairies du Clos old vine cuvée from Christophe Peyrus and Françoise Julien is a blend of fifty percent grenache, thirty percent syrah and twenty percent carignan, with the vines sixty years of age. The wine is outstanding in 2013, tipping the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent octane and offering up exceptional depth in the aromatic blend of black raspberries, spit-roasted venison, *garrigue*, balsam bough, superb soil tones, pepper and a touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a sappy, old vine core of fruit, firm, ripe tannins, good acids and outstanding length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is great juice as well! 2020-2050. **93**.

2012 Pic Saint-Loup "Métairies du Clos" V.V.- Christophe Peyrus et Françoise Julien

The 2012 Métairies du Clos Vieilles Vignes bottling from Christophe Peyrus and Françoise Julien is also outstanding. I am guessing that this and the above wines are a joint venture from the two gentlemen, probably made from purchased grapes, rather than from vineyards owned by Clos Marie, as the wine is labeled a bit differently than the other Clos Marie cuvées. The bouquet delivers a fine, complex constellation of black raspberries, balsam bough, complex soil tones, coffee grounds, woodsmoke and plenty of *garrigue* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, ripe, chewy tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, youthfully balanced and classy finish. This needs time in the cellar as well to fully blossom, but it will be outstanding. 2020-2050. **91+**.

Costières de Nîmes

2015 La Bolida- Château d'Or et de Gueules

The 2015 La Bolida from Château d'Or et de Gueules is composed of a mix of ninety percent mourvèdre and ten percent syrah, with the wine being raised in casks for eighteen months prior to bottling. The wine offers up a fine, youthful bouquet of cassis, baked black cherries, *garrigue*, a good base of soil, a bit of roasted meats and a topnote of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with a good signature of soil, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, tangy and gently warm finish. This needs time in the cellar, but will be a good bottle when it is ready to drink. 2022-2045. **88+**.

2014 Qu'es Aquo- Château d'Or et de Gueules

The 2014 Qu'es Aquo from Château d'Or et de Gueules is a completely different *cépages* from the La Bolida cuvée, as this is a blend of ninety percent carignan and ten percent grenache. The bouquet is complex and focused, offering up scents of dark berries, hung game, chicory, a good base of soil, gentle spice tones and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core, ripe, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. There is already a hint of the autumnal leaves that will come with bottle age, which will only add another layer of complexity to a fine wine. 2019-2045. **90**.



Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence

2015 Domaine Les Bastides Rosé de Saignée (Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence)

The 2015 Domaine Les Bastides Rosé de Saignée is an excellent wine, with its deeper color leading to a nicely vinous and complex bouquet of cherries, rhubarb, a touch of *garrigue* and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, bright acids and a very long, serious finish. The *cépages* here is primarily grenache and cinsault, with a touch of mourvèdre in the mix. Fine juice and really good at the table in the summer months. 2017-2019. **90.**

2013 Domaine Les Bastides Rouge (Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence)

The Domaine Les Bastides Rouge is made up of a blend of seventy percent grenache and thirty percent cabernet sauvignon, with the wine raised in *foudres*. The 2013 version comes in at an even fourteen percent alcohol and offers up a fine, ripe bouquet of cassis, black cherries, cigar ash, soil, a touch of rosemary and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and chewy, with a good core of ripe fruit, good focus and grip and just a touch of backend heat poking out on the finish. Good juice that needs a few years to soften up its tannins a bit more and should age quite well. 2020-2040. **87+.**

2012 Domaine Les Bastides Rouge “Valéria” (Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence)

The “Valéria” bottling from Domaine Les Bastides Rouge is comprised of a mix of fifty percent cabernet sauvignon, forty-five percent grenache and five percent mourvèdre. This is a cask selection of the best lots of the regular bottling, with the aging time in *foudres* doubled for

this wine to roughly two years prior to bottling. The 2012 Valéria shows nice refinement on the nose, wafting from the glass in a blend of black cherries, cassis, cigar smoke, soil, a touch of chocolate and a bit of oak spice from its two years spent in wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite primary in personality, with a plush core and quite a bit of backend tannin still to resolve on the long and nicely focused finish. There is a bit of wood tannin here still waiting to be integrated and this wine will need some cellaring to snap into balance, but if it can absorb its wood, it will be very good. 2023-2045. **86-90** (depending on how well the wood tannins are absorbed with bottle age).

Bandol

1993 Bandol- Château de la Rouvière

This was the first wine I had ever tasted from Château de la Rouvière and it proved to be a good, solid, slightly rustic example of the appellation. The wine is still on the young side, offering up scents of cherries, tree bark, a bit of road tar, Provençal herbs, a fine base of soil and a smoky topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still a bit tannic, with a long, gently chewy and nicely balanced finish. A few more years in the cellar should allow the tannins to fully fall away here, but this wine will always have a veneer of noble rusticity to it. 2022-2045. **88+**.

Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes

2015 Calcinaires Blanc- Domaine Gauby

The Calcinaires Blanc bottling from Gérard and Lionel Gauby is made from an exotic blend of Macabeu, Vermentino, Chardonnay and Muscat, with the wine fermented and raised in stainless steel. The 2015 Calcinaires Blanc comes in at a cool twelve percent octane and offers up a nose of tart apple, green olive, salty soil tones, a touch of bay leaf and a topnote of gently musky floral tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and quite dry in style, with a good core, lovely focus and grip and a long, zesty and low fat finish that really works well at the table. Fine juice. 2017-2025. **91**.

2015 Kaya Blanc- Domaine des Soulanes (Daniel Lafitte)

Daniel Lafitte and his wife Cathy bought this property in Maury in the late 1990s, after Daniel had worked here with the previous owners for fifteen years. While *Vin Doux Naturelle* is the primary wine of Maury, which Daniel produces as well, he also makes dry red and white wines from his eighteen hectares of vines. The Kaya Blanc bottling is produced from a fifty-fifty blend of Grenache Blanc and Gris and Carignan Blanc and Gris (genetic mutations of these two red grapes), with all of these vines sixty-five years of age. The 2015 Kaya Blanc offers up a nascently complex nose of pear, lime peel, salty soil tones, a touch of wild fennel and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature and good length and grip on the focused finish. This is nicely light on its feet and zesty. 2017-2020. **88**.

2015 Kaya Rouge- Domaine des Soulanes (Daniel Lafitte)

The Kaya Rouge bottling from Daniel Lafitte is composed entirely of carignan, with the vines thirty years of age, with the wine fermented and aged in cement tank. The 2015 is plenty ripe at 14.5 percent, but offers up quite good purity in its aromatic constellation of black raspberries, dark chocolate, roasted venison, a touch of pepper and dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with broad shoulders, good, but not great depth at the core, ripe tannins and good length and grip on the nicely balanced finish. This

manages its octane very nicely and is a tasty bottle for relatively near-term drinking. 2017-2025. **89.**

2014 Vieilles Vignes Blanc- Domaine Gauby

The Vieilles Vignes Blanc bottling from Domaine Gauby is a blend of Macabeu (one of the white grapes that form the basis of Cava across the border in Cataluña), as well as grenache blanc and gris. The wine is aged in a combination of older *foudres* and casks for a year prior to bottling and given another eight months of bottle aging in the cellar prior to release. The 2014 version comes in at thirteen percent octane and delivers a fine bouquet of green apple, lime, salty soil tones, chamomile and a hint of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, impressive soil signature, good acids and a long, nascently complex and focused finish. This is tasty today and will also age very nicely. 2017-2025+. **89+.**

2014 Cuvée Jean Pull- Domaine des Soulanes (Daniel Lafitte)

The 2014 Cuvée Jean Pull from Domaine des Soulanes is made up from a blend of forty percent grenache, thirty percent carignan and fifteen percent each of mourvèdre and syrah. Each varietal is fermented on its own and then blended for *elevage* in cement tanks, and like all of Monsieur Lafitte's reds, this is a ripe and broad-shouldered wine, coming in at 14.5 percent alcohol. The nose shows a bit of *sur maturité* in its mix of sappy blackberries, apricot, chocolate and gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with a slight coarseness to its moderate tannins, a bit of backend heat and good length and grip on the slightly blurry finish. This is just a bit overripe for its own good, which is too bad, because there seem to be some good constituent components here and at 13.5 percent alcohol, this could be splendid. 2017-2025. **85.**

2014 Les Salines- Domaine des Soulanes (Daniel Lafitte)

The Les Saline cuvée from Daniel Lafitte is a blend of eighty-five percent grenache and fifteen percent carignan and the 2014 version comes in at a hefty fifteen percent octane. The nose actually shows less overt *sur maturité* than the Cuvée Jean Pull, offering up scents of black cherries, black raspberries, chocolate syrup and just a whisper of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy on the attack, with a good core, some chewy tannins and a fair bit of heat poking out on the long and plush finish. This is not overly complex and a bit hot for my tastes, but it could be far more interesting at lower octane. 2017-2025. **86.**

2014 Orchis "Vieilles Vignes"- Jean-Louis Tribouley

The 2014 Orchis "Vieilles Vignes" from Jean-Louis Tribouley is a fairly hefty bottle, coming in at 14.5 percent, but this is comprised entirely from grenache, so higher octane is often part of this equation. The wine is produced from one hundred year-old vines, fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in older *demi-muids* prior to bottling without filtration. The 2014 Orchis offers up impressive purity in its bouquet of red and black raspberries, a touch of pepper, spit-roasted game, fine soil tones and a floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively soil-driven for its octane, with a plush core of fruit, moderate, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the nascently complex and moderately chewy finish. The alcohol here is very nicely managed and there is no sense of heat on the backend. It could do with a few years in the cellar to allow the tannins to fall away a bit. Good, old vine juice. 2019-2030+. **89.**

2014 Les Bacs "Vieilles Vignes"- Jean-Louis Tribouley

The 2014 Les Bacs "Vieilles Vignes" from Jean-Louis Tribouley is a bit different blend than the Orchis bottling, as this wine is eighty percent grenache and twenty percent carignan,

with the vines averaging fully sixty years of age. This too is plenty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, with the wine being raised in cement tanks prior to bottling. The 2014 Les Bacs is a bit reductive when first opened, but with some aeration, offers up a deep and complex nose of dark berries, hung game, coffee grounds, pepper and charred earth. On the palate the wine is big, full-bodied and just a touch warm on the backend, with a plush core of fruit, firm, slightly gritty tannins and good length and grip on the finish. I would like this better a half point lower in alcohol, but it does a pretty good job of keeping everything together at its higher octane. 2017-2025. **87.**

2012 Coume Gineste Blanc- Domaine Gauby

The Coume Gineste Blanc bottling from Domaine Gauby is comprised of a blend of Grenache Blanc and Grenache Gris, with the vineyards planted on a mix of limestone and schist and fully ninety years of age. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in old *foudres* for a year prior to bottling, with the domaine holding the wine back for a year of aging in bottle as well prior to release. The 2012 vintage of Coume Gineste Blanc comes in at 12.5 percent alcohol and delivers a refined and complex nose of pear, tangerine, musky floral tones, a touch of *garrigue*, a fine base of chalky soil and a bit of beeswax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully wide open and complex today, with a fine core, fine framing acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, classy finish. This is drinking at its apogee today, but will continue to cruise along very nicely for at least the next five years. Great juice. 2017-2022+. **93.**

2012 La Roque Blanc- Domaine Gauby

The 2012 La Roque Blanc from the Gauby family is a wine made from a pair of different variations of Muscat, which are fermented after a long maceration period of ten to twenty days, giving the wine a deep, orange-golden hue from an early age. But, do not be fooled by the color, as this is no dessert wine, but a fully dry wine of breed and complexity, not to mention utterly unique personality. The bouquet offers up a complex mix of apricot, yellow plum, lavender, a touch of new leather, orange peel and *garrigue*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and bone-dry, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, crisp and gently tannic finish from its extended maceration. This is utterly unique in personality and really a superb wine. 2017-2030. **92.**