

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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CALLUNA VINEYARDS
CHALK HILL'S PREEMINENT BORDEAUX BLEND SPECIALIST



I have known David Jeffrey for many years, as he used to buy wine from me back in my merchant days, when he was still working in the world of corporate finance in Manhattan and dreaming of doing something dramatically different with the second chapter of his professional career. Finally, at the start of the new millennium, David and his wife Marla moved west to start that new chapter, with David enrolling at Fresno State University's Oenology Department (once headed by Joe Heitz) and setting out on the road to crafting his own wines. He spent three and half years working on degrees in both Oenology and Viticulture and also spent a season working in St. Émilion at Château Quinault l'Enclos, prior to launching Calluna Vineyards in 2005. It was during his time in St. Émilion that David's vision for what Calluna might offer wine lovers really came into focus, and since his first vintage in 2007, he has offered several different Bordeaux-styled blends from his seven hectares of vines in the Chalk Hill appellation in Sonoma County. While Calluna has kept a relatively low profile during the ensuing years, David has gained a loyal and passionate following for his old school, beautifully balanced and very ageworthy red wines, and in recent vintages, he has added a Bordeaux-styled white wine blend of sémillon and sauvignon blanc to the winery's lineup. David and Marla were drawn to the Chalk Hill area for its cooler microclimate in comparison to Napa Valley, where David could craft wines which

combine the Old World sensibilities he cherished most in wine, crafted within a slower, more temperate growing season and with fewer of the notable heat spikes so often found in Napa today.

Every aspect of Calluna Vineyards is nicely old school, with David and Marla having purchased their Chalk Hill property unplanted and clearing and planting their own vineyards, in much the same way California's earliest winemaking pioneers of previous generations might have done, and the couple has lived on their property and raised their three children at Chalk Hill since 2005. The vineyards have now been farmed for three years organically, and though not yet certified as organic, this is in the works for coming years. They initially planted close to five hectares of vines to classic red Bordeaux grape varieties: cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, petit verdot and malbec. In 2012 they were able to augment these vines with parcels of sauvignon blanc and sémillon, so that eventually the property could begin to offer a white wine as well. The vineyards sit on the crest of a hill in AVA of Chalk Hill, offering a nice variation of exposures, less high temperatures in the depths of summer from the higher elevation, but also less of a dramatic swing in temps when the evening winds blow in from the Pacific (as the cooler air settles in down below at the base of the hillside). Unlike pinot noir, which thrives in those vineyards where there are dramatic diurnal temperature swings, the Bordeaux varieties that David has planted at Calluna would not easily ripen without their being situated on the eastern side of the Russian River Valley and being a touch warmer than vineyard sites on the Sonoma Coast. But, though Chalk Hill is one of the warmer sections of Sonoma, it still sits in the pathway of the Petaluma Gap through which cooler Pacific air flows in each evening and it is a far cry from the much higher summer heat experienced in the heart of the Napa Valley these days. Calluna is beautifully situated to provide fully ripe fruit at the slightly lower octane levels necessary to produce traditionally-styled red wines, thanks to the cooling effect of the Petaluma Gap. The topsoils here are a combination of clay and loam, sitting over a bedrock of shale and sandstone.

The Calluna vineyards are all drip-irrigated, as David notes that “even though we are in a relatively cool area for Bordeaux varietals, we are still on the north coast of California, which has very low humidity and is subject to heat spikes.” He continues, “I do not think we could successfully dry farm our vineyards” as “our vineyards are all on hillsides and ridge tops with relatively leaner soils, so they dry out quickly” and “in this region, we almost never get rain during the growing season, unlike Europe's top growing areas.” For David, “the key issue is to get the right level of irrigation” so that one does not end up with “inappropriately high yields” from too much watering or prune, eviscerated grapes from too little. In the cellars, all of the wines, with the exception of the Colonel's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon bottling, see both their alcoholic and malolactic fermentations take place in tank, prior to racking into barrels for their *elevage*. The percentage of new oak is kept quite low by contemporary California norms, with only the aforementioned Colonel's Vineyard going over fifty percent new wood (and then only sixty percent), with a couple of the bottlings seeing as low as ten or twenty percent. Clearly, Calluna is not your typical, modern house for Bordeaux varietals in California and this is a relatively new winery where those of us with old school, traditional palates can find a lot going on that is highly laudable! David Jeffrey tends to raise his reds in cask for twenty-one or twenty-two months prior to bottling, with rackings taking place every six months or so.

Today, a dozen years out from the first vintage of 2007, Calluna Vineyards offers five different bottlings. These include their Calluna Estate Blanc, which is composed of a blend of roughly two-thirds sauvignon blanc and one-third sémillon, their workhorse red wine bottling called Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- this being one of their most Right Bank Bordeaux-styled wines, as it generally ranges from thirty-five to fifty percent merlot, a quarter to a half cabernet franc, and supporting percentages of cabernet sauvignon, petit verdot and malbec. The Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is raised in a very judicious twenty percent new oak each year, again showing the estate's old school orientation. It is one of the very best values to be had in all of California for this style of wine, as it sells for just over \$30 per bottle and is always impeccably well-made. David Jeffrey also makes one of the finest bottlings of merlot in all of California, which is called Merlot "aux Raynauds" in homage to his mentor at Château Quinault l'Enclos, Alain Raynaud, and which always contains a small amount of cabernet franc in the blend in addition to the merlot. It too sees very little new wood, with the percentage ranging here from ten to twenty percent of new casks, depending on the style of the vintage. There is only one bottling at Calluna that is one hundred percent cabernet sauvignon, which hails from a parcel on the property called "The Colonel's Vineyard" and this is the sole wine in the lineup here that is a touch more modern in style, with the wine undergoing its malolactic fermentation in new oak barrels and its *elevage* conducted in sixty percent new oak. Happily, it is still nicely restrained in its octane level, so the nod to a more modern-styled wine at Calluna is not all that evident to my palate!

David Jeffrey's top of the line bottling is called Calluna Estate, and this is the winery's Bordeaux-styled blend that "leads with cabernet sauvignon" as David likes to say. The *cépages* of this wine varies from year to year, depending upon the relative success of each variety on the property, so that for instance, vintages such as 2012 and 2014 of Calluna Estate included nearly sixty percent cabernet sauvignon, but a vintage such as the 2008 was only thirty-five percent cabernet. The bottling always includes all five red wine varieties planted on the property in the cuvée, and the new oak is again kept quite reasonable, as the wine is raised in forty percent new casks each year. The Calluna Estate is made as a top Bordeaux bottling would be, with each varietal vinified and raised separately for the first four or five months, after which barrel selections are made and blending trials conducted to come up with each year's final composition. It is always a beautifully structured wine made for long-term cellaring (yet another nod to the traditionalist orientation at Calluna) and clearly seems like a wine built for fifty to seventy-five years in bottle. The first vintage of the Calluna Estate produced was the 2008, which is still four or five years away from its true apogee, so it seems that most vintages of this excellent bottling deserve a full fifteen years in the cellar to really start to blossom completely and drink with unrestrained generosity. To my palate, it is now one of California's very top division red wines from Bordeaux varietals made for long-term cellaring, and it deserves to be ranked up at the very pinnacle alongside wines such as the cabernets from Philip Togni, Cathy Corison, Ric Forman, Ridge, Mount Eden and the like as the very best bottlings for long-term cellaring and very positive evolution in bottle.

In addition to the five standard bottlings now produced at Calluna, David Jeffrey has occasionally produced another single varietal wine as circumstances have allowed, a solo bottling of Malbec. Currently, the winery is offering this pure Malbec bottling from the 2016 vintage, but in very small quantities and only through their website. I asked David about the origins of this single varietal wine, and he noted that "I have bottled about 50 cases of Malbec

each year since 2011- primarily driven by the fact that I have more Malbec than I want to put in the blends.” He continued, “regarding Malbec, while it is considered one of the *Bordeaux varietals*- and there really is not a lot of Malbec left in Bordeaux- it seems substantively different from the other four varietals because it has an exotic blueberry/blackberry element which sets it apart, even when it is made in my relatively leaner style.” So, as the varietal is only used in the two blends of the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée and the Calluna Estate bottlings, what is leftover here in certain vintages is bottled up on its own and made available to mailing list customers. Another incentive for getting on the winery’s mailing list is that David Jeffrey has held back a percentage of each of the recent vintages to release to the winery’s customers as library selections, so that it is possible today to buy their flagship Estate bottling as far back as the 2012 vintage in vertical six packs, and their fine Calluna Vineyards Cuvée (maybe California’s finest value at \$33 a bottle for a first class Bordeaux blend) is currently available in the 2015, 2014 and 2013 vintages. David notes that there remain very small quantities of the 2011, 2010 and 2009 Calluna Estate still available as well, which he is thinking about packaging up in a small vertical offering, but I suspect that if you wrote and asked, they might be made available.



David and Marla Jeffrey at our April vertical tasting at Bar Boulud in New York City.

In April of this year, David and Marla Jeffries hosted a vertical tasting of their various bottlings here in New York, to show how nicely the wines are evolving with bottle age. It was an abnormally warm day for April in New York (though in this age of climate change, what indeed

is “normal” weather?) and it was a great pleasure to descend into the cellar level at Bar Boulud, escape the heat and sample a fine range of older vintages of the Calluna bottlings. David had very kindly included a few of his 2011s in the retrospective tasting, knowing my fondness for this vintage in California (I may well be a minority of one in championing the lovely potential of the best 2011s!) and I was quite pleased to overhear a couple of other people at the tasting say “the whole lineup was excellent, but my favorite was the 2011.” The wines all uniformly showed well at our tasting, confirming my impressions from first tastings of the wines when they were released that David is fashioning classically balanced wines for the long haul at Calluna Vineyards, and all of his red wines are built to reward long-term cellaring. Of the white wines shown, the 2016 Calluna Estate Blanc was not singing and I did not take a note on it, but I was not certain if it was not just my palate needing some time to adjust after coming in from the heat outside (it was close to ninety degrees Fahrenheit that day!) and perhaps I should have circled back to it at the end of the tasting to see if it was showing more properly after I had cooled off with the great range of red wines. So, I do not have a note on the wine in this report, but the 2018 Blanc seemed to be in fine form and showing very well. Calluna Vineyards is a relative newcomer to the firmament of top California estates, but as the notes below will attest, David Jeffrey has hit the ground running and these are some of the state’s most exciting Bordeaux-styled wines to be found today. If you are not yet familiar with David and his wines, now is a great time to get acquainted, as prices remain some of the most reasonable in all of California!

Calluna Estate Blanc

The 2016 vintage was the first for the Calluna Estate Blanc bottling, which is a lovely Sonoma white wine based on the style of the great white wines of Pessac-Léognan in the Bordeaux region. The wine is roughly a two-thirds blend of sauvignon blanc and one-third sémillon (though this will vary a bit from vintage to vintage), with the wines barrel-fermented and then aged in neutral oak casks for five to six months prior to bottling. David Jeffrey does not allow the wine to undergo malolactic fermentation, so as to keep the acidity up in the finished wine without having to acidulate. The 2018 Blanc was really showing beautifully at the tasting and is the current release of this new white wine from Calluna Vineyards.

2018 Calluna Estate Blanc- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2018 Calluna Estate Blanc is a two-thirds, one-third blend of sauvignon blanc and sémillon and the wine is excellent. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very stylish blend of gooseberry, green apple, a touch of beeswax, salty soil tones and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a good core, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is very fine juice. 2019-2025. **92.**

Calluna Vineyards Cuvée

As I mentioned above, the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is one of the very best values to be found anywhere today in the realm of California wine, as there are scant few Bordeaux-styled blends or cabernet sauvignon bottlings that offer this kind of cellaring potential, complexity and class at such a low price point, as the current release is selling for all of \$33 a bottle! Like all of David Jeffrey’s blended bottlings, the cépages here changes from year to year, reflecting how each grape variety has succeeded in the vintage and how the blend best comes together, though merlot is often the dominant component in this wine. After the blend is settled upon for a given vintage, the wine spends twenty-two months aging in barrel, of which around twenty percent are

new oak year. The Calluna Vineyards Cuvée starts out life nicely structured, but never overly tannic, and though some restaurants in California currently like to pour it by the glass after it is a few years old, to my palate, this wine does not really start to drink properly until it has reached the age of eight to ten years old. From that point on, it seems likely that another twenty-five to thirty years of life in bottle are no problem for the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée, and this is truly a fine, fine workhorse bottling from David Jeffrey. If you are yet to try one of David's excellent wines, the Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is the perfect entry level wine to discover the superb quality of this estate's wines!

2016 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2016 "CVC" bottling from Calluna Vineyards is a bit riper than the lovely 2015 version, tipping the scales at 14.3 percent alcohol, but sharing that same sense of balanced grace as the previous vintage. The blend this year is forty-nine percent merlot, twenty-six percent cabernet sauvignon, ten percent cabernet franc, eight percent petit verdot and seven percent malbec. The wine offers up a lovely aromatic mix of sweet dark berries, cassis, a hint of dark chocolate, cigar wrapper, lovely soil tones, a touch of Pomerol-like tobacco leaf and a very discreet base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, ripe and full, with lovely focus and grip, moderate tannins and a long, complex and nicely balanced finish. One can sense the ripeness here a bit more than on the previous vintage, but it is not hot at all and simply shows a bit more backend generosity as a result of the slightly higher octane. Despite it being fairly approachable, I would still tuck it away for at least four or five years and let the tannins fall away and the secondary layers of complexity start to emerge. 2023-2060. **92.**

2015 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2015 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is showing very well at the present time, and probably only needs another four or five years in the cellar to really reach its plateau of maturity. The *cépages* this year was fifty-one percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet sauvignon, fifteen percent cabernet franc, eight percent malbec and seven percent petit verdot and the wine comes in at 13.8 percent octane. The bouquet is ripe, but also nicely complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of black raspberries, cassis, cigar smoke, a hint of chocolate, a fine base of soil and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core, modest tannins and fine focus and grip on the long and very nicely balanced finish. This is a lovely wine in the making. 2023-2060. **92.**

2012 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2012 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is composed of a slightly different blend, as it comes in with thirty-six percent merlot, twenty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent cabernet franc, and ten percent each of petit verdot and malbec. Aromatically, it is just starting to show some secondary layering in its mix of cassis, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, cedar and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-plate depth, with fine focus and detail, a cooler vintage personality than the 2015, and a long, modestly tannic and complex finish. Qualitatively, this is very close to the 2015 version, but I like the style of the 2012 a hair better. This is really a serious wine for its price tag! 2022-2060. **93.**

2011 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2011 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is quite ripe for this cool vintage, coming in at fourteen percent, and it is starting to really drink beautifully at eight years of age. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and very refined blend of cassis, black cherries, dried

eucalyptus, a lovely base of soil tones, a bit of cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very elegant in personality, with good depth at the core, fine focus and grip, melting tannins and a long, ripe and complex finish. This is not particularly concentrated, but it has plenty of intensity and is a very satisfying bottle that has plenty of life still ahead of it, but is really drinking beautifully today. 2019-2045. **91.**

2009 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2009 Calluna Vineyards Cuvée is now just entering its plateau of peak maturity and is starting to really drink nicely, though it remains beautifully balanced and still has at least three decades of potential life ahead of it. The *cépages* of the 2012 has a touch more merlot in it than the 2012 version, but quite a bit more cabernet franc, as its breakdown is forty-three percent merlot, forty-one percent cabernet franc, ten percent cabernet sauvignon, four percent petit verdot and two percent malbec. The nose has blossomed beautifully with a decade's worth of bottle age and now offers up scents of cassis, black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, dark soil tones, cigar ash, a nice hint of spiced meats, cedar and a topnote of tobacco leaf. On the palate the wine is deep, full and quite elegant in profile, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, melting tannins and a very long, wide open and really classy finish. This is first class juice! 2019-2050+. **93.**



Merlot “aux Raynauds”

I love David Jeffrey’s Merlot “aux Raynauds” bottling, which is the most “grown up” California merlot that I regularly taste these days, since Bob Travers sold Mayacamas Vineyards and Terry and Frances Leighton decided that one vintage of this varietal at Kalin Cellars was sufficient for their long-term cellaring needs. This is most emphatically not one of your fruit forward, velvety and simple red wines that made merlot so ubiquitous and so unappealing to seasoned wine drinkers a couple of decades ago, but rather a wine that pays tribute to the great wines made from this grape variety in Pomerol and St. Émilion before the scourge of Michel Rolland’s success started to so muddy the Right Bank waters. For this bottling, David makes a selection of what he feels are the finest blocks of merlot in a given vintage, and these are then augmented with a touch of cabernet franc to give a bit of that Right Bank Bordeaux palate feel and aromatic complexity to the wine. The merlot vines at Calluna are planted on a block that has a higher percentage of clay in the topsoil layer, where the variety can thrive. The bottling is aged for twenty-two months in cask, with between ten and twenty percent of the wood used for the élevage new barrels in a given vintage. To my palate, six to eight years of bottle age really allows the wine’s secondary layers of complexity to emerge, and though it is beautifully balanced out of the blocks and quite accessible at a fairly early age, it makes sense to let it rest quietly in the cellar for at least these six or seven years and let it really blossom and come into its own. This is the smallest production bottling at Calluna, with generally no more than two hundred cases produced in even the most prolific of vintages. It truly is California’s gold standard when it comes to this varietal today, and again, a very good value, as it sells for under \$40 a bottle.

2016 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The new release of the 2016 Merlot “aux Raynauds” from Calluna Vineyards includes twelve percent cabernet franc in the *cépages* this year. The wine offers up a very promising nose of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar wrapper, a dollop of Pomerol-like fresh herbs, dark soil tones, a touch of cedar and lovely spice elements in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and already nicely complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, vibrant and classy finish. Despite a few heat spikes leading into harvest, this wine has retained really good acidity in 2016 and this shows in its precision and backend lift. 2023-2055+. **92.**

2013 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2013 Merlot from David Jeffrey is aging very well and is every bit as impressive today as when I first tried the wine, back in the spring of 2016. The *cépages* of the 2013 is very similar to the 2016 version, with thirteen percent cabernet franc blended into the merlot in this vintage. The wine is getting nice Pomerol signature elements on the nose today, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of sweet dark berries, cigar smoke, black plums, dark chocolate, a touch of young Pomerol weediness, dark soil tones, gentle spices and a bit of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure, complex and very nicely soil-driven, with a velvety attack, a good core and a long, modestly tannic and very sophisticated finish. This is really lovely and has decades of life ahead of it, but is starting to really hit on all cylinders! 2019-2050. **93.**

2011 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

While 2011 does not get much love amongst commentators wed to the modern style of cabernets and merlots in California, I really like the style of this cooler vintage and David Jeffrey has really made a beautiful bottle of merlot in 2011. Again, the Pomerol sensibilities are very

evident here, as the wine delivers a fine and complex bouquet of plums, fresh herb tones, tobacco leaf, dark soil elements, a touch of eucalyptus, chocolate and just a bit of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and quite poised in profile, with beautiful balance and grip, fine-grained tannins and a very long, elegant and classy finish. This is not a particularly big wine, but it is utterly complete! It is a bit more structured than the 2013 and will need a bit more bottle age to really blossom, but it has all of the constituent components in place for a long and very lovely life in bottle. 2022-2055+. **94.**

2009 Merlot “aux Raynauds”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

I had never previously had the pleasure to taste the 2009 Merlot from Calluna and the wine was showing very well indeed at our tasting in April. This wine is fully ninety-six percent merlot in 2009, with only four percent cabernet franc rounding out the blend. It is starting to really drink with grace and style at ten years of age, wafting from the glass in a refined constellation of plums, chocolate, dried eucalyptus, a touch of black raspberry, vanillin oak and a bit of Barolo-like road tar that is quite nice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with good focus and grip, still a touch of backend tannin and a long, refined finish. 2019-2045. **92.**

Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”

The “Colonel’s Vineyard” bottling is probably David Jeffrey’s only wine that could be called slightly modern in style, as it is composed entirely of cabernet sauvignon, and as I mentioned above, the wine undergoes its malolactic fermentation in new oak barrels. It is raised in sixty percent new casks after the malo is completed for just under two years. The wine hails from a 1.25 acre parcel of cabernet sauvignon planted right up at the summit of the vineyard hill on the property, with a southwesterly exposition that allows it to bask in the sunlight deep into the afternoon each day during the growing season. This too is quite limited in quantity, as the largest production I have seen of this bottling was in the 2016 vintage, when David produced 204 cases of the “Colonel”. In many other recent vintages, there has only been around one hundred cases produced. It is very much a Calluna wine, with poise, elegance and a lovely structural chassis for long-term aging, despite its slight nod to modernity in being produced entirely from cabernet sauvignon and seeing its malolactic fermentation undergone in barrel.

2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The newly released 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard” from Calluna is a very good bottle in the making and may well be my favorite vintage yet of this cuvée. The bouquet offers up a youthful and nicely sappy nose of red and black cherries, a touch of eucalyptus, Cuban cigar, a fine base of soil and a generous, but nicely measured serving of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a superb core of fruit, fine-grained tannins, good acids and lovely focus and grip on the very long, well-balanced and very promising finish. As I said above, despite its nod to a more modern style, I do not find that this is out of character with the rest of the old school Calluna lineup. 2028-2065+. **94.**

2014 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

2014 was a hot growing season, so not always one of my favorites, but the 2014 Colonel’s Vineyard bottling was showing quite nicely at our tasting in April. The wine is starting to show the first vestiges of maturity on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, cassis, cigar ash a nice dollop of fresh herbs, dark soil tones, a bit of eucalyptus and a

lovely framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with a fine core, very good balance and focus, ripe tannins and a long, still fairly primary finish. Though the nose is starting to show a bit of development at five years of age, this remains a young and promising wine on the palate and still needs some time alone in the cellar. 2029-2065+. **92+**.

2010 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

2010 was a cool growing season (though not as much as the following year of 2011), and as David Jeffrey notes, “it is a bit of an outlier for us stylistically, as there is a bit of herbaceousness in all of our 2010s.” However, there is also plenty of complexity on both the nose and palate and this is a very good bottle in the making. The nose delivers a fine mix of cassis, black cherries, a touch of road tar, cigar ash, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones, cedar and a nice touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite refined in profile, with a good core and grip and a long, still quite closed and tannic finish. This is shut down at the moment, but will be a fine bottle when it is ready to drink. 2025-2060+. **92**.

2007 Cabernet Sauvignon “The Colonel’s Vineyard”- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The inaugural vintage of the Colonel’s Vineyard is really starting to drink nicely at twelve years of age. The wine offers up a wide open and refined bouquet of sweet cassis, black cherries, cigar smoke, dried eucalyptus, dark soil tones and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with melting tannins, very good focus and grip and a long, suave and very well-balanced finish. This is just now entering into its plateau of maturity, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2050. **92**.



The entrance to the hilltop vineyards of Calluna in the Chalk Hill AVA.

Calluna Estate

The Calluna Estate is David Jeffrey's flagship bottling and it is currently one of the very finest Bordeaux blends from California produced anywhere, and I find it far more interesting (and far more Bordeaux-like in orientation) than wines such as Opus One and that crowd that came of age back in the decade of the 1980s and have wandered far, far away from their original raison d'être as their early successes have been squandered at those estates with the passing of the years. As I mentioned in the introduction above, the Calluna Estate bottling was first produced in the 2008 vintage, as David Jeffrey wanted to have at least one vintage under his belt before deciding where on the property he wanted to start sourcing the grapes for his top of the line bottling.

2016 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2016 vintage is the newest example of Calluna Estate to be prepared for market, as the wine is due for release in the coming months. The *cépages* this year is forty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-eight percent cabernet franc, thirteen percent merlot, nine percent petit verdot and three percent malbec. The wine shows lovely nascent complexity in its pure bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, cigar smoke, a lovey touch of spice, eucalyptus, dark soil tones, a hint of lavender and a restrained framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite suave in its structural polish, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and excellent length and grip on the poised and very promising finish. This needs plenty of time in the cellar to blossom properly, but it is going to be outstanding. 2031-2085+. **95.**

2015 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2015 Calluna Estate is a touch riper in personality than the very cool and classic 2016 version, but it shares a similarly refined structural harness and great potential for long-term aging. The blend of the 2015 version has a bit more merlot and a bit less cabernet franc than the 2016, being comprised of a blend of forty-seven percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc, ten percent petit verdot and four percent malbec. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a beautiful blend of black raspberries, black cherries, cigar ash, eucalyptus, lavender, cedar, dark soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with excellent mid-palate concentration, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and still quite youthful finish. This has closed down a bit since I last tasted it, but has not lost any of its outstanding potential. 2030-2085. **95.**

2014 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2014 vintage of Calluna Estate is one of the most heavily-invested cabernet sauvignon vintages of this wine, as the blend this year is fifty-eight percent cabernet sauvignon, augmented by eighteen percent cabernet franc, seventeen percent merlot, five percent petit verdot and two percent malbec. The wine offers up a beautiful and quite sappy bouquet of black cherries and black raspberries, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, violets, eucalyptus, a touch of cigar ash and a nice framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent depth at the core, fine focus and grip and a long, ripely tannic and very well-balanced finish. Tasted side by side with the 2016 and 2015 versions, the 2014 Calluna Estate seems just a hair less complex, but perhaps this is simply a sign that it is closing down a bit for hibernation? In any case, this too is an excellent wine in the making. 2026-2065+. **93+.**

2012 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2012 vintage is another more generously cabernet sauvignon vintage of Calluna Estate, as this wine includes fully fifty-nine percent of this varietal in the blend this year. The balance is composed of twenty-five percent merlot, seven percent cabernet franc, five percent petit verdot and four percent malbec, fully underscoring that this bottling can range quite a bit in terms of *cépages* depending on which varieties excel in a given vintage. The wine is really starting to hit its stride at age seven, offering up a gorgeous nose of red and black raspberries, Cuban cigar, dark soil tones, a touch of balsam bough, a fine base of soil, lavender, a touch of eucalyptus and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is complex, full and a bit more reserved than the nose suggests, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate and quite suave tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is not all that many years away from starting to really enter into its plateau of maturity. It is an outstanding wine by any measure! 2025-2070. **94.**

2011 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

I was very, very happy to see that David Jeffrey had brought along the 2011 Calluna Estate to our vertical tasting in April, as I really like the style and shape of this vintage for traditionally-minded producers. As readers may recall, Mother Nature stepped in and tempered ripeness levels quite a bit in 2011, with the cool summer allowing only moderate levels of sugar accumulation (at least by modern standards in California) and providing a vintage of quite old fashioned sensibilities. The 2011 Calluna Estate is composed of a blend of forty-four percent cabernet sauvignon, twenty-six percent merlot, nineteen percent cabernet franc, seven percent petit verdot and four percent malbec. I did not take note of what its octane level was in this vintage, but I have to imagine that this is one of the lowest in alcohol since the debut vintage of 2008. The wine is aging beautifully, offering up lovely secondary stirrings in its aromatic constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, eucalyptus, Cuban cigar wrapper, dark soil tones, allspice, cedar and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and very pure and complex, with moderate tannins, lovely focus and grip, a perfectly respectable core of fruit and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This is not quite as deep in the mid-palate as these other vintages of Calluna Estate, but the wine is complete in every respect and a lovely wine in the making. 2027-2060. **93.**

2010 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The 2010 vintage, according to David Jeffrey, is a bit of an outlier in the pantheon of Calluna Estate bottlings, as he noted it was pretty recalcitrant out of the blocks and is only now starting to stir a bit as it closes in on its second decade and start to show some of its detail and true potential. It remains quite a structured wine and definitely needs more time in the cellar, but it is starting to round into form nicely on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is quite classically Sonoma cabernet in its profile, offering up scents of cassis, black cherries, weedy overtones, eucalyptus, tobacco leaf, dark soil elements, espresso and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, closed and full, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, primary, but still quite promising finish. This is nowhere near as charming as the 2012 is today, but it has very good potential and will reward patience with an outstanding wine! 2028-2075. **94.**

2008 Calluna Estate- Calluna Vineyards (Chalk Hill)

The inaugural vintage of Calluna Estate was showing beautifully at our vertical tasting and getting fairly close to its plateau of maturity. The beautiful bouquet shows a nice, “cool fruit” composition of cassis, dark berries, dried eucalyptus, cigar ash, dark soil tones, a touch of tobacco leaf, cedar and a lovely topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and impressively pure on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, impressive soil signature, still some well-integrated tannins and excellent grip and balance on the long and quite complex finish. The *cépages* of the 2008 was thirty-five percent cabernet sauvignon, thirty-two percent merlot, eighteen percent malbec, twelve percent cabernet franc and three percent petit verdot, so it is a bit different in the personality of its blend than any of its younger siblings. Fine juice. 2023-2070. **94.**

RECENTLY-TASTED WHITE BURGUNDY WITH A FOCUS ON PULIGNY-MONTRACHET “LES DEMOISELLES”



In the heart of the Pernand section of the hill of Corton, at the entrance to Bonneau du Martray's parcel.

It has been eighteen months since I last wrote a feature on white Burgundy in the bottle, with that last report primarily focused on the four recent vintages of 2015, 2014, 2013 and 2012, though there were a few older bottles sprinkled in amongst the notes on wines from those vintages. Subsequent to writing the feature on those four recent vintages of white Burgundy, I had a chance to speak at an extended 1996 Burgundy weekend that included more than twenty examples of white wines from that vintage and was very much surprised by how many very good bottles we found still from amongst those 1996 whites. As I mentioned at the time, the gentleman whose cellar provided all of the wines for that epic investigation into the 1996 Burgundies had hand-selected every bottle of white wine in the tasting, based on the color of the wine in the closed bottle, always opting for the very lightest colored wine and this worked out very well to minimize the number of premoxed bottles of 1996 whites that we had that autumn weekend. As I had sold off all of my 1996 whites many, many years ago (when the 1995 vintage first started to premo, as I reasoned that whatever was done during the *elevage* of the 1995s that may have contributed to premo, the same practices would certainly have been done with the 1996s and several subsequent vintages, as the problem did not even come to light until the early years of the

new millennium), I had never had the opportunity to cull through my cases of 1996s to note the variations of color in the wines and their connection to levels of premo. They had all simply been happily consumed in some of New York's finest dining establishments when they were still young and pristine. But, after having the experience of several very good and completely sound 1996 white Burgundies last fall, I became far more interested in drinking bottles of white Burgundy from the heart of the premo years if the colors were still sound.

As readers may recall from my piece on the 1996 Burgundy vintage last October, while we had a lot of excellent 1996 white Burgundies at our tasting, not all of the non-premoxed whites had evolved beautifully, as some wines were caught in a strange stage of suspended animation, without having oxidized, but also, without having really developed their secondary and tertiary layers of complexity in the more classical style of vintages that predate the arrival of premature oxidation with the 1994 vintages in Burgundy and Bordeaux. These fresh, but non-evolved examples remained quite vibrant and bright, with good acids and depth of fruit, but without having added to their aromatic or flavor complexities and were rather perplexing wines to taste and evaluate. Having sold off my premo-era vintages of white Burgundy before they began to crash and burn, I had never previously encountered white Burgundies from this camp, where they had escaped early onset oxidation, but had also not evolved classically. In the notes that follow, I have a few more examples of wines that fall into this classification of mature white Burgundy, with no signs of premo and lovely structural integrity, but without having really developed a whole lot of complexity with the passage of time. As my sample size of these types of older white Burgundies is relatively small, I will not make any attempt to try to come up with any reasoning for this phenomenon, as they may simply be statistical anomalies, but that a few more have crossed my path beyond the extensive 1996 white Burgundy range samples last fall is certainly food for thought for the future.

In any event, I did not have any plans to write this report for this issue, but a couple of invitations to "mature" white Burgundy tastings in the last month prompted me to take a look through my recent tasting books to see how many other white Burgundies I had drunk in recent times and decide if I had enough material for another report on white Burgundies in the bottle. Happily, I had drunk a lot more than I recalled, and coupled with these pair of recent tastings, I found that I had more than ample material for another feature on white Burgundy in the bottle. Both of the recent tastings were of the intrepid variety, and we had plenty of bottles that were in the eight to twenty-plus year range out from the vintage, so that I had a chance to investigate wines that I no longer have in my own personal cellar. As I have written in the past, I once thought I owned a lifetime supply of white Burgundy in my cellar, with more than forty cases of really good premier and grand cru bottlings, but almost all of these were in the range from 1995 to the 2000 vintages and they ended up getting sold off in their youth, when premo first reared its exceedingly ugly head. These days there are no top premier or grand cru whites in my cellar (having brought my last bottle of 1993 Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" to the first of these two large tastings- I should note I liked the wine more than my dining companions that evening, but I like old white Burgs) and my cellar is now completely empty of white Burgundy for extended aging. I used to once believe that when "premo is cured" I would build up that corner of the cellar again, but at age fifty-eight, I now realize that the boat has sailed on that dream and in actuarial terms, I am not likely to be able to tuck away the first great, post-premo white

Burgundy vintage (if and when the cause of premox is identified and corrected) and drink it at full maturity. So, that enjoyable task will have to be left for a future generation.

However, the one good thing about being in the generation that is now probably too old to lay down young white Burgundy for twenty-odd years and watch it mature to its peak is that I am also old enough to remember what white Burgundy was like back in the days before premature oxidation was such a plague to the dry white wines of the world. Being now numbered amongst the “old guard” of Burgundy lovers, I have had the pleasure to drink a beautiful range of the region’s greatest white wine bottlings at full maturity, back when twenty years was sort of the expected peak for a top flight grand cru or twelve to fifteen years for a superb premier cru white Burgundy. And in the second of the two recent “mature” white Burgundy tastings, I had a chance to revisit a significant sampling of wines from this bygone era, as our second tasting came replete with a lovely range of wines from the 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1992 white Burgundy vintages. All of the wines from these vintages came from the personal cellar of Chet Kern, who is one of New York’s best-known and most passionate Burgundy lovers, and Chet has a passion for white Burgundy that predates mine by several years and he had the good sense to both salt away a lot of top bottlings of white Burgundy from those vintages back when they were in the market, and then to keep his hands off of many of them and allow them to reach full maturity. Consequently, while so many collectors’ cellars are meagerly stocked with white Burgundies from the days before premature oxidation arrived, Chet still has a reasonable supply and generously provided a goodly number of bottles to serve as the foundation for his “mature” white Burgundy tasting this spring.

These days, when I am fortunate enough to drink a white Burgundy bottling from any of these old vintages from the 1980s or early 1990s, it is usually a single bottle, and it has been many years since I had a chance to really taste through a nice selection of wines from those vintages side by side and it brought back marvelous memories of the days when most white Burgundies could be counted on to age so long and gracefully. What was equally enjoyable about this tasting was not only the number of bottles from the 1980s, but that Chet had dug in his cellar to focus on a single premier cru bottling, that sits adjacent to both Montrachet and Chevalier-Montrachet, the tiny premier cru of Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”, which is part of the greater vineyard of Caillerets in Puligny and is mostly the fiefdom of the Colin family. I had sold a bit of Puligny “les Demoiselles” back in the old days and had a chance to drink it with a bit of frequency way back when, but I had not crossed paths with a bottle in many, many years, and it was a great pleasure to be able to taste several mature examples side by side at our tasting. I have included a background sketch on the les Demoiselles vineyard below, as the very high quality of these bottles reminded me of just how good the wine can be and prodded me to do a bit of historical research on the parcel and its small number of owners, as I had never really known this information previously. In the vintages that we drank of Puligny “les Demoiselles” at our tasting, the primary man behind the wines was Michel Colin of Domaine Colin-Deleger, who was a very, very talented *vigneron* during his long career and whose wines I had happily sold to clients and drank with great regularity back in my merchant days. As the discussion below on les Demoiselles will show, he figures even more prominently in the history of that premier cru than I imagined, for he was responsible for all but one of the bottlings of the wine that was produced during his long career. But, more on that below.

There was another aspect of our exploration of the range of Puligny “les Demoiselles” bottlings from the 1980s and early 1990s that caught me by surprise, as I had not anticipated it or noticed this aspect of the wines from this era in previous tastings, and it was only when a nice spread of bottlings and vintages were assembled to assess side by side that it came to my attention just how different the wines from this era were texturally from white Burgundies in more recent times. When I was tasting through so many wines from Michel Colin from his heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, the thought that he had used an old mechanical press for his wines, rather than a modern pneumatic press immediately came to mind as a possible reason for the quite different textures of his mature wines, and I was able to confirm with Chet Kern the day after our tasting that Michel Colin indeed did utilize an old mechanical press for his wines. Perhaps my recent trip to Germany and discussions about the superior merits of mechanical presses with both Julian Haart and Klaus-Peter Keller brought this thought to my head as I was tastings Michel Colin’s mature wines. In any event, they are not the only winegrowers who have espoused a preference for old mechanical presses over pneumatic ones, as Patrick Piuze of Chablis fame made a switch back to a mechanical press as well a few vintages back and is extremely happy with the results. This recent range of les Demoiselles bottlings gave me a chance to further reflect upon what this old type of press might add to the profile of white Burgundies, as there was really quite a difference between the older vintages and the more recent wines we had on this particular evening and which were made using pneumatic presses.

Perhaps I should take a moment to set the stage for how this tasting was organized, as that may perhaps put this discussion of textural differences in the older wines in a proper context. We started out with two flights of older Puligny “les Demoiselles” bottlings from the Colin family, ranging from 1986 to 1990 vintages, and then followed these up with a couple of flights of Chevalier-Montrachet from more recent vintages, owing to the close proximity of the premier cru les Demoiselles with both Chevalier-Montrachet and Montrachet itself, as it seemed like a good way to make a comparison on the relative merits of the les Demoiselles *terroir* to its more illustrious neighbors. And, of course, with the younger vintages, statistics had their way and we hit our fair share of premoxed bottles of Chevalier-Montrachet. But, the more interesting results of the consecutive flights was in the rather marked textural differences between the older vintages of les Demoiselles and the younger vintages of Chevalier-Montrachet, all of which had been pressed with modern, pneumatic presses. One could really sense the difference between the two styles of wines (and I am assuming that this was at least partially attributable to the differences in the two types of presses used), as there was almost a “chewy” aspect to the palate textures of the older wines made by Michel Colin, which was not replicated in any of the younger examples of Chevalier-Montrachet. I cannot articulate the differences between the two styles of wines, but can only say that it seemed quite striking when the wines were served in close proximity to each other. Perhaps it has something to do with the extract in the wines from those that are mechanically pressed, rather than pneumatically, but I am over my head a bit when discussing this aspect of winemaking and will have to check with those with proper training in this regard. But, I could certainly taste a dramatic difference that was not to be attributable simply to bottle age or variations of *terroir*.



The Premier Cru of Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”

This tiny parcel of sixty *ares* of vines is a subsection of the larger premier cru vineyard of Caillerets in Puligny-Montrachet, which lies partially below Chevalier-Montrachet on the slope and contiguous to Montrachet itself in the southern end of the commune. Puligny’s Caillerets vineyard is not to be confused with the excellent Chassagne-Montrachet premier cru vineyard of the same name, which is a completely different *terroir* and at the southern end of Chassagne. The beautifully-situated vineyard of Puligny “Caillerets” is just to the north of Montrachet in the same middle section of the slope, and up above les Pucelles on the hillside- primetime real estate! The Caillerets section is 3.33 hectares, with the les Demoiselles portion an additional sixty *ares*, so the two combined total just under four hectares in size. The northern end of the vineyard of Chevalier-Montrachet, which sits up above the southern end of Caillerets, reaches a bit further north than the border of Montrachet below it, and it is this section of Caillerets which lies below the extended sector of Chevalier that has been designated as “les Demoiselles”, though in actuality, it is really part of the greater Caillerets vineyard. As I mentioned, today there are only sixty *ares* of vines in the les Demoiselles section of Caillerets, which end up being the first thirty rows of vines in from the Montrachet border. At the start of the twentieth century, a Chassagne-Montrachet-based *vigneron*, Joseph Colin bought half of what is today the les Demoiselles portion of Caillerets, with the other thirty *ares* purchased in the same era by a small, absentee owner that is now known as SCI Saint-Abdon, with its present day proprietors living on the French-Belgian border and leasing out their production of les Demoiselles (along with their other substantial vineyard holdings in Chassagne) to various *vignerons* in the region.

When Joseph Colin and the SCI Saint-Abdon bought their parcels in les Demoiselles at the outset of the twentieth century, the Appellation Contrôlée system had not even been adopted yet, as this would not occur until 1936. At this time, the Puligny vineyard of Caillerets was still planted almost exclusively to pinot noir and this was a red wine vineyard, though with a few exceptions. A little higher up the slope, contiguous with Chevalier-Montrachet, were a few parcels of vines in Caillerets that were probably already planted to chardonnay, which were owned by the Chartron family in Puligny and the *négociant* firms of Louis Jadot and Louis Latour, and these sections were also considered part of the les Demoiselles sector of Caillerets. In 1938, both Maisons Jadot and Latour successfully petitioned the INAO to have their half hectare parcels in this upper section of Caillerets added to next door neighbor Chevalier-Montrachet (and hence the designations ever since on their bottlings of Chevalier from these two parcels as Chevalier-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”), and after the end of the second world war, the Chartron family was also successful in having their parcels officially classified as Chevalier-Montrachet. With these three additions to neighboring Chevalier-Montrachet, the remaining slice of Caillerets known as les Demoiselles was down to the sixty *ares* of vines owned between Joseph Colin and the SCI Saint-Abdon, making this one of the tiniest of the crown jewels of premier crus in the village of Puligny-Montrachet. With two owners in les Demoiselles, each owning half of the thirty rows of vines, it should be a pretty straightforward equation, but this is not the case, as even these two small parcels became a bit more complicated when one starts to look for the bottled wines from this tiny sliver of a vineyard today.

Joseph Colin’s thirty *ares* of vines were eventually split between two of his sons, François and Louis Colin, so eventually Michel Colin, proprietor for many decades of Domaine Colin-Deleger (and the son of François), received fifteen *ares* of vines in les Demoiselles, and his cousin, Bernard Colin (son of Louis), received the other half of Joseph Colin’s parcel of vines here. Both Michel and Bernard Colin farmed their own sections of les Demoiselles and made their own wines from their production during the duration of their careers, so that this much of the les Demoiselles equation is at least pretty straightforward by Burgundy standards. The other half of the sixty *ares*, those controlled by the absentee owners of SCI Saint-Abdon, had a *métayage* agreement for their parcel, with the vines farmed by none other than Michel Colin, but the two-thirds of the production that the SCI Saint-Abdon received every year as their share of the wine, was sold to Domaine Guy Amiot et Fils in Chassagne-Montrachet. So, we have one, fifteen *ares* parcel of vines owned by Michel Colin outright, and thirty *ares* of vines owned by the SCI Saint-Abdon, but farmed by Michel Colin and the wines made by him before the SCI Saint-Abdon would take their two-third share of production and sell that to Guy Amiot et Fils in cask. The remaining one-third of the production from the SCI Saint-Abdon-owned vines was retained by Michel Colin as payment for his tending of those vines and making the wine. However, he did not choose to blend this with his own production of les Demoiselles and make a single bottling, but kept the two separate and sold them under different labels! Consequently, the wine made from the one-third share of the SCI Saint-Abdon-owned vines was bottled and sold under the Domaine Colin-Deleger label, but Michel Colin’s production from his own fifteen *ares* of vines in les Demoiselles was bottled under the name of his mother, Madame François Colin. Hence we have three different bottlings of les Demoiselles made and sold under the Colin family’s various labels, with one made by Bernard Colin and two made by Michel Colin, but sold under different labels and produced from different rows of vines. In addition, there was also

the Guy Amiot et Fils bottling of les Demoiselles, made under their contract with SCI Saint-Abdon, but with those vines farmed and the wine actually made by Michel Colin!

As I mentioned above, I was quite familiar with Michel Colin's wines back in the decade of the 1990s, when I was a merchant specializing in Burgundy. I sold and drank a lot of wines made by Domaine Colin-Deleger in this era, and though I had lost track of the wines a bit in recent times, Chet's tasting brought back plenty of great old memories of these magnificent wines and I will make it a point to add Domaine Colin-Deleger to my list of estates to visit on my next trip to Burgundy, as I would love to get caught up with how things are going here now that the next generation of Colins has assumed the reins of the estate. However, I had never tasted any of the wines from Bernard Colin prior to this tasting and I was extremely impressed by the quality of the vintages of les Demoiselles that we tasted from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s made by Bernard Colin. This domaine has also passed on to its next generation of *vignerons*, but the quality of the wines made by Bernard were so superb that I will also make it a point to visit and taste at this estate on future trips to the region and get caught up with how the wines are these days at Domaine Bernard Colin et Fils. I should mention that our second white Burgundy tasting was held at one of New York's new fine dining establishments, l'Avenue, which is located on the top floors of Saks Fifth Avenue in the heart of midtown Manhattan. Prices were as one might expect from a restaurant at Saks, but the food was simply outstanding, the service impeccable and it is a great place to dine, with its views of St. Patrick's Cathedral and Rockefeller Center just below, provided price is no object. The floor below the dining room at l'Avenue is dedicated to their bar area and it is a big, comfortable and expansive space with one of the most beautiful terraces open to the public to be found in midtown and a great place to meet for an aperitif, even if not dining at the restaurant above. I took note that their quite extensive Champagne list includes Ployez-Jacquemart, which would be a very civilized bottle to settle into with friends out on the terrace during the summer.

The following tasting notes are organized chronologically by vintage, and within each vintage subsection, geographically from north to south. Where there are notes on more than one example of a given appellation, the wines are then listed alphabetically by producer. It is not a comprehensive lineup, as other than the two recent mature white Burgundy tastings that I attended, they are simply white Burgundies that I have drunk since the last in the bottle report on these wines was included in the newsletter a year and a half ago. I did have the pleasure to attend a dinner of older Bouchard Père et Fils wines back in the early spring and have included the notes on the white wines that we had that evening in the article below, with the notes on the equally compelling red wines from that evening still waiting in the wings for a proper article. As is my custom, I have not included any notes on prematurely oxidized wines in the tasting notes that follow, though I have had my share of premoxed bottles over the last eighteen months. As I have mentioned numerous times in the past, given that premox is a bottle by bottle phenomenon, it is simply the luck of the draw whether one gets a pristine bottle or an oxidized one after a given vintage has passed its sixth birthday, and given this random nature of the problem, I do not wish to infer that one wine or producer is more prone than another to premox issues, by including tasting notes on the premoxed wines that I have crossed paths with in the article below. My statistical sampling is simply too small to be meaningful, and all that can be achieved by including notes on premoxed wines from such a small sampling is to erroneously skew perceptions one way or the other.



The Chartron family's parcel of Chevalier-Montrachet; the 1er Cru of les Demoiselles lies just below it on the hill.

2014 Chablis “Chapelot”- Domaine Raveneau

The 2014 Chapelot from the Raveneau family is still a fairly young wine, but our bottle was starting to blossom quite well and was already starting to drink very nicely. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of apple, fresh lemon, chalky minerality, beeswax, spring flowers and just the first hint of the candied lemon peel of mature Raveneau. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely concentrated at the core, with bright acids, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully emerging finish. I would normally expect at bottle of the Chapelot at Domaine Raveneau to take a few years longer to start to drink this well- particularly in a classically racy vintage like 2014, but this bottle was already hitting nicely on all cylinders and was a pleasure to drink. 2019-2035+. **92.**

2014 Chassagne-Montrachet “les Vergers”- Domaine Ramonet

The 2014 Vergers from Domaine Ramonet is still in its primary stage of development and is not showing a whole lot of complexity yet. The bright and pure bouquet is a blend of pear, apple, a hint of mint, spring flowers, chalky soil tones and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still quite adolescent, with a good core, bright acids and good length and grip on the quite undeveloped finish. I assume a lot more nuance will emerge here with more bottle age, but right now this is quite adolescent and it is a good time to let it rest in the cellar. 2022-2045. **91+?**

2014 St. Aubin “Derriere du Chez Edouard”- Domaine Hubert et Olivier Lamy

The 2014 vintage of Derriere du Chez Edouard from Domaine Lamy is just about ready for primetime drinking and is showing beautifully on both the nose and palate today. The

bouquet delivers a fine combination of apple, pear, lemon zest, a touch of youthful iodine, chalky minerality, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, bright and full, with a good core, lovely mineral drive, fine focus and grip and a long, energetic and mineral-driven finish. Fine, fine juice in the making, 2020-2045+. **92+**.

2014 Bâtard-Montrachet- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

Maison Bouchard's 2014 Bâtard-Montrachet is a truly superb young wine. The bouquet is pure and beautifully elegant in profile, jumping from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, *crème patissière*, chalky soil tones, a hint of iodine, lemon blossoms and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and complex, with a great core of fruit, racy acids, impeccable balance and a long, focus and zesty finish of excellent breed and personality. First class juice that is destined to age long and gracefully, if the long shadow of premoxy can be held at bay. 2020-2050+. **95**.

2012 Puligny-Montrachet "les Tremblots"- Domaine Hubert et Olivier Lamy

The 2012 les Tremblots from Olivier Lamy is a bit more concentrated than usual, due to the very short cropload of this year, and the wine is a tad four-square in personality as a result—though this might just be a passing phase. The bouquet is quite vibrant still, offering up scents of pear, peach, tangerine, beeswax, chalky soil and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good cut and grip, but not a lot of refinement (as of yet) on the still quite primary backend. There are some good raw materials here, but it remains to be seen how much elegance and complexity will emerge with further bottle age. It is not that the wine is not accessible today, but it just remains a bit dense stylistically. 2018-2030+? **88+?**

2012 Montrachet- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 2012 Montrachet from Bouchard Père et Fils is a lovely, young wine that still needs some time in the cellar to fully stretch its wings and start to drink with the generosity of maturity. The youthful nose offers up fine potential in its mix of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a superb core of fruit, bright, zesty acids and excellent balance on the long and nascently complex finish. The 2012 vintage can sometimes be a bit too concentrated from the very low yields of this year, but that is not in evidence at all in this utterly classical Montrachet in the making. Fine juice. 2024-2060. **94**.

2011 Corton-Charlemagne- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

Bouchard Père et Fils' 2011 Corton-Charlemagne is a lovely wine that is still several years away from its apogee. The bouquet is bright, youthfully pristine and quite complex, wafting from the glass in a blend of lemon, orange zest, pear, chalky minerality, white flowers and a lovely framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, racy and full-bodied, with superb focus, cut and grip, a fine core and a long, mineral-driven and very classy finish. This is more of a middleweight example of Corton-Charlemagne, in the style of the 2011 vintage, but it is long on both complexity and intensity of flavor and is quite impressive. Give it a couple more years to really open up from behind its girdle of acidity and then plan to drink it for as long as premoxy stays away. 2021-2055+. **93**.

2011 Chevalier-Montrachet- Domaine Philippe Colin

I really liked Philippe Colin's 2011 version of Chevalier-Montrachet (Philippe is Michel Colin's son). This was bottled in a gently reductive manner and still shows a bit of youthful iodine on the nose as a result, but it is evolving nicely and should have no issues down the road.

The first class bouquet offers up a fine blend of apple, pear, iodine, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh almond and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and utterly classical in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, fine transparency and grip, bright, zesty acids and a long, classy and vibrant finish. Most impressive. 2019-2050. **94.**

2011 Chevalier-Montrachet- Domaine Michel Niellon

Michel Coutoux's 2011 Chevalier-Montrachet is a very good bottle that is starting to drink quite nicely, but still has room to grow with further bottle age. The nose is complex and classically musky in composition (in the Domaine Niellon style), offering up scents of apple, a touch each of passion fruit and papaya, chalky soil tones, vanillin oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite open on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, sound framing acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is a fairly powerful wine for the 2011 vintage, and I am not sure I would not have preferred a bit more lightness of step in this vintage, but the wine is deep, complex and still quite vibrant. 2019-2040. **92+.**

2009 Chevalier-Montrachet- Domaine Philippe Colin

2009 is far from my favorite vintage of white Burgundy, but the '09 Chevalier from Philippe Colin is a good, solid example of this more buxom vintage. The bouquet offers up a ripe, but, fresh blend of apple, butter, hazelnuts, a good base of chalk, a touch of butterscotch and a discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite tasty, with plenty of generosity on the attack, broad shoulders, sound acids and good length and grip on the reasonably complex finish. Not a great Chevalier, but a really good 2009 white Burgundy. 2019-2035. **91.**

2008 St. Aubin "les Frionnes"- Domaine Hubert et Olivier Lamy

Olivier Lamy's 2008 St. Aubin "les Frionnes" is drinking beautifully at age ten and is really in the sweet spot of its development. The nose is pure and classy, delivering scents of pear, lemon, chalky minerality, apple blossoms, beeswax and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still beautifully crisp and precise, with a good core, fine soil signature, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the *à point* finish. Lovely juice. 2018-2030. **92.**

2007 Meursault "Genevrières"- Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey (served from magnum)

The 2007 Genevrières from Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey has done a nice job of steering clear of premox, but that said, it has not aged in a particularly laudatory direction and is not a very impressive example of this superb *terroir*. The idiosyncratic bouquet offers up scents of candied lime peel, beeswax, a touch of fresh-cut grass, chalky soil tones and a sound framing of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still quite bright and bouncy, with a good core, but a finish that turns woody on the backend from an overly generous serving of new wood. It is not yet starting to dry out from the oak treatment, but it is defined on the backend by its new wood component and is not as balanced as I would like. Beyond the new wood, there is also the issue that this is hardly emblematic of the marvelous *terroir* of Meursault "Genevrières". 2018-2030. **88.**

2007 Chevalier-Montrachet- Domaine Philippe Colin

Our particular bottle of the 2007 Chevalier-Montrachet from Domaine Philippe Colin was drinking beautifully, and though it might have been just a touch forward in style, it was completely sound and offered up plenty of pleasure and charm. The bouquet delivers a classic

blend of apple, tangerine, chalky minerality, hazelnuts, citrus peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open on the attack, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely mineral drive, bright, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is really delicious today, and though I expect that there may be bottles out there that are just a touch more structured and less evolved, it was awfully easy to drink this particular bottle today. 2019-2030+? **93.**



Something really good to go with mature white Burgundy- a superb Hamachi preparation at l'Avenue in New York.

2006 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Bonneau du Martray

2006 was one of my least favorite vintages for white Burgundy in recent times, but the Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlie is a very good example and quite a lovely wine. This was bottled quite reductively to try and hold off premoxy and it has done so quite nicely, though it still has some reductive notes evident on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is quite pretty, offering up scents of apple, pear, iodine, chalky minerality, a touch of *crème patissière* and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, long and still quite fresh, with good focus and grip, lovely framing acids and a long, well-balanced finish. This is lacking a bit of complexity today, but perhaps that will come with further bottle age. It remains fresh as a daisy and nicely light on its feet, which was no small feat in the 2006 vintage. 2019-2040+. **90.**

2005 Chablis “les Clos”- Domaine William Fèvre

The 2005 Chablis “les Clos” from Domaine William Fèvre is holding on nicely and remains quite fresh, but as this was not a particularly high acid vintage to start with and this wine now is quite soft and probably should be drunk up in the next few years. That said, it remains impressively bright and detailed for a wine with fading acids, as the bouquet delivers a fine mix of green apple, pear, flinty minerality, a dollop of smokiness, a nice topnote of anise and limepeel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with good depth at the core, good length and grip and a bright and bouncy finish. The only real issue here for extended aging is that the acids are peeling away and the wine is already quite soft, though still fresh and well-balanced. But, the lack of acidity seems to indicate that the wine has reached the end of its plateau of maturity and will start to descend in the not too distant future. But, for very short-term drinking, this is still a tasty bottle. 2019-2024. **91.**

2005 Chevalier-Montrachet- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

This particular bottle of the 2005 Chevalier-Montrachet from Maison Bouchard Père et Fils was a bit past its best and was due for drinking up, though there may well be fresher and more extant bottles out there. At age fourteen, it is in the midst of its risk of premoxy and this particular bottle has lost some backend grip and freshness- far more than would be the case with a fourteen year-old bottle of Chevalier back in the days before premoxy existed. In any case, it was not a total disappointment, as the bouquet offers up scents of honey, tangerine, hazelnuts, limestone soil tones, orange peel and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, forward and now rather chunky and lacking in breed, with a fairly short, soft finish. This bottle is just modestly compromised by premoxy, but still not too bad in a pinch. 2019-2025? **87.**

2004 Meursault “Tesson” Mon Plaisir- Domaine Guy Roulot

The 2004 Tessons from Jean-Marc Roulot is still a pretty reductive wine and it seems like some of that reduction may be permanently locked in at this stage. The bouquet remains fresh and vibrant, but shows little signs of development in its mélange of pear, apple, iodine, chalky soil tones, hazelnuts and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and fairly youthful in its flavor spectrum, with good cut and grip, but no signs of any developmental complexity with its fourteen years in the cellar. It has avoided premoxy, but it has paid a price in terms of some permanent reduction which seems to have blocked its development. It is an okay wine, but is not much changed from its youth and that is a demerit at age fourteen. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2004 St. Aubin “Clos du Meix”- Domaine Hubert et Olivier Lamy

The 2004 St. Aubin “Clos du Meix” from Olivier Lamy is aging very gracefully and is now drinking at its apogee of peak maturity. The refined nose jumps from the glass in a blend of apple, candied orange, limestone minerality, acacia blossoms, *crème patissière* and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely transparent, with a solid core and fine length and grip on the complex finish. Lovely St. Aubin and such a pleasure to hit a 2004 white Burg in its prime! 2018-2024. **92.**

2004 Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Ramonet

The 2004 Ramonet Bâtard-Montrachet is an excellent example of the vintage and the wine is aging quite gracefully and along a classical arc. The bouquet today is just starting to show the first signs of secondary development in its blend of pear, peppermint, salty soil tones, spring flowers, lemon zest, a touch of beeswax and a very well-done base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with bright, snappy

acids, lovely focus and grip and a very long, vibrant and classic finish. Fine, fine juice that is still in climbing mode. 2022-2050+. **94+**.

2001 Chablis “les Preuses”- Domaine Vincent Dauvissat

I was never that big of a fan of the 2001 vintage in Chablis, as there was quite a bit of botrytis in this year, but the 2001 Preuses from Monsieur Dauvissat has steered clear of this potential pitfall and is really drinking quite nicely at age seventeen. The bouquet is pure and *à point*, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of lemon, pear, beeswax, chalky minerality, white flowers and just a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and quite complex, with a bright and wide open personality, lovely acids and grip and a long, poised and impressively racy finish. Fine juice and a revelation for the 2001 vintage in Chablis! 2018-2040. **93**.

1999 Meursault “Charmes”- Domaine Rémi Jobard

I have very little experience with older wines from Rémi Jobard, but this 1999 Charmes was very good indeed. The color was still reassuringly light when we opened the wine and the bouquet is bright and fresh, offering up a nicely evolved blend of apple, pineapple, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, citrus zest and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe in style, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and still quite zesty finish. This is in its prime and still has plenty of life ahead of it. An impressive showing! 2019-2040. **91**.

1996 Chablis “Montée de Tonnerre”- Domaine Raveneau

This particular bottle of 1996 Montée de Tonnerre from Domaine Raveneau was still a bit on the youthful side and needed some time in decanter to properly blossom. The bouquet eventually offers up a slightly adolescent mix of fresh lemon, pear, still a bit of youthful grapefruit, chalky minerality, straw and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and still plenty racy, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, primary finish. At twenty-three years of age, I was expecting a bit more of that “candied lemon” element of a mature Raveneau Montée de Tonnerre, but the wine is still in climbing mode and could do with more time to really hit maturity. Of course, a slow evolving bottle is far better than an advanced one! 2021-2045+. **93**.

1996 Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet- Domaine Paul Pernot

It is not often where one goes to a dinner with two bottles of 1996 white Burgundy in the lineup and hits two fresh and tasty bottles, but that was exactly our luck on this particular evening. This vibrant and nicely evolved bottle of the 1996 Paul Pernot Bienvenues was completely untouched by premox and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, a bit of toasted almond, white flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and *à point*, with a good core, fine focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and vibrant finish. Good juice, but not quite as complex as I might have anticipated at this stage of its development, based on how beautiful it was in in the first blush of youth back in the late 1990s. But, still fresh and extant and that is something in this age of premox! 2019-2030+. **92**.



1995 Corton-Charlemagne- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

Bouchard's 1995 Corton Charlie has held up pretty well from one of the early pre-mox vintages. Today, it is quite tertiary in aromatic and flavor profile, but still extant, as it offers p scents of fresh apricot, hazelnuts, orange peel, chalky soil tones and a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a solid core, sound framing acids and good length and grip on the wide open and generous finish. This particular bottle will not last a whole lot longer, but it is quite satisfying today and still holding onto its structural integrity with at least one hand. 2019-2025. **90.**

1995 Montrachet- Domaine Marc Colin

The 1995 Montrachet from Marc Colin is standing the test of time pretty well, and though it is probably not quite as structurally sound as it would have been in the era before potential pre-mox issues, the wine remains bright, complex and still extant and drinking with breed and purpose. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex and mature blend of pineapple, apple, citrus zest, a touch of buttered popcorn, a good base of soil and a well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and *à point*, with a fine core, lovely soil signature and a long, zesty and complex finish. There is not a ton of backend cut or grip here today, but everything is still in place at the present time and for drinking over the next decade or two, there is plenty to enjoy. My gut feeling is that it is not going to make really old bones and it is probably better off to plan to drink it up over the next decade or so, though it will live longer than this. 2019-2040. **92.**

1994 Chassagne-Montrachet “Chaumées”- Domaine Ramonet

The 1994 Chaumées from Domaine Ramonet is actually quite a nice wine and is a step up from the general quality of this white Burgundy vintage. The bouquet offers up a mature and still quite vibrant blend of pineapple, paraffin, a touch of candied citrus peel, chalky soil tones, mint, vanillin oak and a whiff of white chocolate in the upper register. On the palate the wine is surprisingly deep and long, with a full-bodied format, still quite good acidity and fine grip on the slightly four-square finish. This is not a great bottle of Ramonet premier cru, but it is a very good one and rather transcendental of the overall quality of the 1994 vintage. 2019-2035. **88.**

1993 Chassagne-Montrachet “Morgeot”- Maison Verget

I did not have high expectations for this wine, as the color was starting to get a bit amber around the edges, but it turned out to be a pleasant surprise. The wine is certainly old and tertiary in terms of aromatics and flavors, but the fine underlying girdle of acidity of the 1993 vintage has kept the wine also surprisingly fresh and structurally sound and the wine is actually drinking very well still. The bouquet offers up an old white Burgundy blend of apricot, browned butter, tangerine, new leather, almonds and a very good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and quite tertiary, but with a good core, lovely acids and grip, fine focus and a long, complex and fully mature finish. This has some of the characteristics of the really old wines featured below, like the 1955 Bouchard Corton-Charlemagne, and in a perfect world, one would like it to be a bit younger in personality, but it is still drinking very well indeed and for those who like old wine flavors, there is still a lot to enjoy here. 2019-2027. **90.**

1992 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Madame François Colin

Like many 1992 white Burgundies today, the les Demoiselles from Michel Colin is starting to just get a bit long in the tooth and is probably in need of drinking up at least over the middle term. The bouquet is complex, with a ripe and tropical profile of pineapple, toasted almond, butter, gentle soil tones, nutskin, vanillin oak and a bit of popcorn in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and wide open and ready for drinking up, with still good vigor, complexity and cut, but not the most elegant of long finishes. This is still a tasty bottle, but like many of the 1992s, it is starting to degrade a bit and was a far better drink ten or fifteen years ago than it is today. That said, there is still quite some pleasure to be found here and it shows no signs of leaping into the abyss in the immediate future. 2019-2035. **88.**

1990 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Bruno Colin

Bruno Colin’s 1990 les Demoiselles is at its absolute apogee and is one of the best premier crus from this vintage that I have tasted in the last couple of years. The pure and vibrant bouquet jumps from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, a hint of fresh pineapple, chalky soil tones, a touch of almond paste and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and grip, lovely, zesty acidity and a long, beautifully balanced and absolutely *à point* finish. This is an outstanding wine at the peak of its powers! 2019-2045. **93.**

1990 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Madame François Colin

Our bottle of the 1990 les Demoiselles from Madame François Colin was tiring a bit, and I am not sure if it was the wine or the bottle. The color is quite a bit more amber than the other two 1990s served alongside of it, with the nose showing an old wine and tertiary blend of peach, orange peel, a touch of browned butter, chalk, nutskin and a smoky topnote. On the palate the

wine is still deep and full-bodied, with a good core, but just starting to fray at the edges, with the alcohol poking out just a touch now on the still quite long and satisfying finish. My gut instinct is that there are still fresher bottles out there, but this one needed drinking up- though it still has some nice, old white Burgundy pleasure in it. 2019-2025+? **87.**

1990 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Colin-Deleger (SCI Saint-Abdon)

The 1990 les Demoiselles from Colin-Deleger is drinking very nicely as it closes in on its thirtieth birthday, but the inherent ripeness of the vintage is showing a bit here and the wine is not quite as refined or precise as the Bruno Colin bottling. The bouquet is complex and still bright and zesty, offering up scents of apple, pineapple, a touch of hazelnut, a good base of chalky soil tones, pastry cream and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and complex, with good depth of fruit at the core, still quite sound acidity and fine length and grip on the well-balanced, but slightly buxom finish. This is a good bottle that still has plenty of life in it, but it is not the most elegant 1990 that one is going to find today. 2019-2040. **90.**

1989 Corton-Charlemagne- Domaine Bonneau du Martray

The 1989 Corton-Charlemagne from Bonneau du Martray is fully into its apogee of peak maturity and drinking very nicely indeed. The lovely, mature nose offers up some tertiary elements in its mix of pear, apple, candied lemon, chalky soil tones, *crème patissière*, a touch of almond and a discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and synthesizes the ripe fruit of the vintage beautifully with a lovely base of limestone minerality. The finish is long and zesty, with fine focus, grip and mineral drive. Good juice. 2019-2035+. **92.**

1989 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Madame François Colin

Michel Colin’s 1989 les Demoiselles is drinking beautifully and was a step up in terms of complexity from the very good 1992 version paired up with it at our tasting. The bouquet here is beautifully tertiary in personality, yet still vibrant and precise, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, tangerine, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, a hint of the new leather to come with further bottle age, citrus peel and buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely zesty, with a lovely core, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and beautifully *à point* finish. This is a first class example of a 1989 white Burgundy still on its plateau of peak maturity. 2019-2040+. **92.**

1989 Chassagne-Montrachet “Caillerets”- Domaine Bernard Morey

The 1989 Chassagne-Montrachet “Caillerets” from Bernard Morey has aged very gracefully and remains a lovely bottle of wine, though I do not doubt that its true apogee was probably ten to fifteen years ago. Today, the wine is most attractive on its complex and quite elegant nose, which offers up scents of pear, tangerine, pineapple, chalky soil tones, complex and discreet spice tones and an exotic topnote that hints at sea urchin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fresh and very well-balanced still, but no longer quite as complex as the nose promises. The finish is long and still quite bright and the wine still has many years of life in it, but it has probably just started to look over the far side of the plateau and is not going to get any better with further bottle age. I would opt for drinking it up over the next handful of years, as I suspect it will continue to get simpler on the palate with further bottle age. But, today, it is still a very tasty drink. 2019-2035. **91.**

1988 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Louis et Bernard Colin

To my palate, the 1988 vintage of white Burgundy is the finest vintage of the decade for present day drinking, and the '88 les Demoiselles from Louis and Bernard Colin is a great example. The bouquet is pure, complex and leaps from the glass in a refined blend of apple, pear, fresh almond, a touch of *crème patissière*, limestone soil tones, spring flowers and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is bright, full and beautifully resolved, with an outstanding core, lovely transparency and grip, great acids and a very, very long, classy and complex finish. There is a textural dimension to the best 1988 whites, which is almost chewy in their sense of extract, and which is very, very exciting today. 2019-2050. **94.**

1988 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Madame François Colin

Michel Colin's 1988 les Demoiselles is another excellent example of this vintage. The nose delivers a refined aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, nutskin, a lovely base of chalky soil tones, a hint of browned butter, a gentle base of vanillin oak and just a whisper of briny, sea urchin-like tones of a fine old white Burgundy starting to emerge in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with fine focus and grip, lovely balance and a long, complete and *à point* finish. This is a touch further along its evolutionary arc than the Bernard Colin bottling, but it too is excellent. 2019-2035+. **92.**



1986 Puligny-Montrachet “les Demoiselles”- Domaine Louis et Bernard Colin

There was a quite a bit of botrytis scattered around the vineyards of the Côte de Beaune in 1986, and thirty-three years on, this can produce some rather atypical aromatics when bottles are first opened. This was the case with the 1986 les Demoiselles from Louis and Bernard Colin, but with fifteen minutes of air, the wine blossomed nicely and really showed beautifully from that point forward. The bouquet when it has fully opened up delivers scents of pineapple, fresh apricot, nutskin, chalky soil tones, a hint of butterscotch, citrus peel and a nice, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and still has lovely mid-palate depth, with fine focus and grip and a long, complex and quite zesty finish. This is good juice in the slightly idiosyncratic mold of the 1986s today. 2019-2045. **92.**

1982 Bâtard-Montrachet- Maison Louis Jadot

The 1982 Bâtard-Montrachet from Louis Jadot continues to drink very nicely at age thirty-six, which is pretty impressive, considering that the 1982 vintage was a pretty low acid vintage and the wines were quite *flatteur* right out of the blocks. Today, the wine offers up a deep and beautifully mature nose of pear, apple, a nice touch of beeswax, almond, chalky soil tones, vanillin oak and a touch of honey in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely crisp, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and grip and a long, fully mature and quite complex finish. This wine started to show just a touch of structural fraying on the backend as we got to the bottom of the bottle, so its time is in hand, but it really has held up very well indeed for a 1982 white Burgundy. 2018-2025+. **91.**

1964 Montrachet- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

The 1964 Montrachet from Maison Bouchard Père et Fils is really a lovely bottle of wine and continues to drink quite beautifully for a wine that is now fifty-five years of age! The bouquet shows that this wine hailed from a nicely ripe vintage back in the day, offering up a deep and complex constellation of apricot, orange peel, walnuts, salty soil tones, new leather and a lovely topnote of sweet browned butter. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with impressive focus and vivacity, a good core and a long, balanced and classy finish. I last drank this wine all the way back in 2004 and, though the wine has lost a touch of vibrancy over the ensuing fifteen years, it remains a lovely example of old, extant and classy Montrachet. 2019-2030+. **91.**

1955 Corton-Charlemagne- Maison Bouchard Père et Fils

There is often been speculation that red Corton and Corton-Charlemagne have almost identical shelf lives, and this really superb bottle of the 1955 Corton Charlie from Bouchard Père et Fils will certainly do nothing to change that legend. The wine is just superb at sixty-four years of age, offering up a bright and tertiary bouquet of apricot, toasted almonds, candied orange, a beautiful base of chalky soil tones and a very exotic (and attractive) topnote that is redolent of sea urchin. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and still sports excellent mid-palate depth, with fine structure and grip, sound framing acids and even a whisper of backend tannin perking up the long, complex and still *à point* finish. This is a beautiful bottle of old white wine and really pretty amazingly sound and fresh for its advanced years! 2019-2035+. **92.**

1921 Chablis “Vaudésir”- Domaine Louis Pinson

This bottle actually had no label, but Vincent Dauvissat, who so generously shared the bottle, felt pretty certain it was from Domaine Louis Pinson, who was a very important estate back in the early years of the twentieth century in Chablis. The wine is still drinking beautifully for such an old bottle of Chablis, offering up a complex bouquet of orange, apricot, a touch of chalkiness, citrus peel, salty soil notes and a hint of coffee in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, long and still amazingly fresh for its age, with lovely focus and complexity and a long, timeless finish. This is a really lovely bottle of very, very old Chablis! It is so beautifully balanced that it seems like it will continue to cruise along like this for several more decades! 2018-2050. **92.**

CHÂTEAUX BÉLAIR-MONANGE AND MAGDELAINE IS THE MARRIAGE WORKING IN ST. ÉMILION?



Much has been made of the historic decision on the part of the Moueix family and the INAO authorities to roll Château Magdelaine into its next door neighbor of Château Bélairst-Monange back in 2012. In the 2011 vintage there were two châteaux, and poof, in 2012, there was only Château Bélairst-Monange. Perhaps this says more about the real position of *terroir* in the firmament of Bordeaux than any other persuasive sales' pitch. The reasoning behind the Moueix family's desire to subsume the vineyards of Magdelaine into those of their most recent purchase of Château Bélairst-Monange were quite logical, as Château Bélairst-Monange had some of the very oldest vines in all of Bordeaux when the property was sold to the Moueix family and, according to many reports, not all of those vines were healthy and productive enough for modern-day production expectations in the region. The probable options open to the Moueix family were either to do a wholesale replanting of Château Bélairst-Monange and take their new St. Émilion gem off of the market for several vintages (and then have to live exclusively with very young vines on the entire property for many subsequent vintages to follow), replant on a piecemeal basis and continue to have to put up with the much lower yields from the remaining old vines, or be creative and combine the two neighboring estates into one much grander Château Bélairst-Monange and cease to produce Magdelaine. I do not have any knowledge of just how bad

the old vines were in terms of their health at Château Bélair-Monange when the Moueix family decided to petition for a combining of the two properties with the INAO, so perhaps it was untenable to consider replanting slowly in the vineyards here and keep both properties alive. However, my gut instinct suggests it was simply the most cost-effective avenue to take and the relatively unimportant history of Magdelaine be damned.

As I wrote in my requiem for Château Magdelaine back in 2015, it makes sense to revisit the lead up to the Moueix family finally buying the neighboring estate of Bélair-Monange in 2008 and eventually deciding to dissolve Magdelaine into it in 2012. By 2002, the Moueix family was already part owners of Château Bélair, as when Pascal Delbeck, the long-time *Chef de Cave* of both Châteaux Ausone and Bélair received the latter estate via inheritance from its previous owner, Elyett Dubois-Challon, he had to bring in a partner to help pay the huge inheritance taxes on this very generous gift. Consequently, he sold a thirty-one percent stake in Château Bélair to the Moueix family in 2002. When Monsieur Delbeck received the estate in 2002, he was fifty-four years of age and had already experienced an outstanding and highly praised career as the cellar master at both Châteaux Ausone and Bélair, but he was not an independently wealthy man who could cavalierly hand over the enormous check to the French government required to cover his tax bill from the gift of the property. However, the estate was also in need of some investment in both the cellars and to address the situation in the vineyards, so Monsieur Delbeck no doubt felt handcuffed financially during his short stint as the proprietor of Château Bélair and eventually sold the remaining sixty-nine percent share of the property to the Moueix family in 2008. At the time, it seemed like a very good solution, as the Moueix family was probably Bordeaux's most high profile champion of classically-styled wines on either side of the Gironde and it was hard to envision that things might not turn out to the benefit of lovers of traditionally-styled St. Émilion.

However, the issues that confronted Monsieur Delbeck during his ownership of Bélair did not go away with the sale of the property to the Moueix firm, and there was still a very real need for both investment in the *chais* and in particular, attention to the thirteen hectares of vines at the property. The Moueix family are far more financially secure than Monsieur Delbeck was when he ran Château Bélair, but that did not make the prospect of serious investment there any more palatable to the new owners than it had been to Monsieur Delbeck. The vines at Bélair-Monange were extremely old by Bordeaux standards, and I am sure during the latter years of the ownership of the property by Madame Elyett Dubois-Challon, the prospect of investing heavily in the vineyards here was not ever seriously considered, and it was unlikely that the positive benefits of replanting decrepit vines was ever going to be realized until the property had changed ownership. Consequently, first Monsieur Delbeck, and then the Moueix family, were confronted with the sobering reality that this very small property was in fact really quite a bit tinier, in terms of grape production that its measured thirteen hectares of vineyards, due to the very large percentage of ancient and reportedly quite ailing vines at the estate. Crop loads at Bélair at this time were simply microscopic by Bordeaux standards, and this affected both the possibility to be strict with selection to produce the best wine possible at the property, and of course, the economics of running the estate.

In early 2012, the Moueix family came up with a potential solution to the replanting problems they were confronted with at Bélair-Monange, which was to absorb next door neighbor

Magdelaine into their new property. This would allow a complete resurrection of the vineyards at Bélair-Monange without losing the wine in the Bordeaux market for an extended period of time or being forced to try and produce a world class wine from extremely young vines. As readers most likely already know, St. Émilion revisits their classification system, for what it is worth, every ten years, so the Moueix family petitioned the INAO in the spring of 2012 for the possibility to merge their two properties the next time the St. Émilion classifications were rewritten. At the time, according to Christian Moueix, “the thought was that this decision would be undertaken in time for the 2022 rankings, as never in our wildest dreams did we anticipate that the decision would be taken so quickly and included in the 2012 classification” and the family was “completely shocked when the 2012 St. Émilion classification was released and there was no listing of Magdelaine.” In fact, Christian Moueix immediately called one of the officials in charge of the 2012 classification to find out why Magdelaine had been left off the list and, much to his surprise, was told “that we have simply agreed to your petition to merge Magdelaine into Bélair-Monange.” From an economic standpoint, the decision made total sense, as Bélair-Monange sells for a higher price over Magdelaine, and despite the Moueix family’s ownership of Magdelaine since 1952, they had never been particularly successful in selling it widely in the market. However, the very brisk decision on the part of the INAO did not allow for any public relations groundwork to be laid about the merging of the two properties.

In any case, since the first blended vintage of Château Bélair-Monange in 2012, I had been of the opinion that though Magdelaine was no more, at least its spirit would live on at a higher price tag with the wines of Château Bélair-Monange, and I had been very favorably impressed with the sample of the 2012 of this wine that I had tasted at the Moueix firm’s offices in Libourne back in the spring of 2013. As this ended up being my last *En Primeur* trip to Bordeaux, I had not followed the evolution of Châteaux Bélair-Monange and Magdelaine in their new relationship and was therefore, quite delighted when a subscriber (and passionate Magdelaine fan), Tom Reddick, proposed that we do a tasting of recent vintages of both properties to see if we could ascertain how the marriage was working out in recent times and compare this to how the two wines performed on their own previously. Going into the tasting, my expectations were firmly that the new vintages of Château Bélair-Monange would be even better than the previous ones prior to the absorption of Magdelaine into the property, as they would benefit from Magdelaine’s healthy and reasonably old vines now going into the blend and there would be no growing pains evident from replanting at Château Bélair-Monange. As I had liked the vintages of Château Bélair-Monange that I had tried during the *En Primeur* campaigns for the 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 vintages, I was not expecting to be disappointed by any of these wines in our tasting and fully expected that the wines would be even better with Magdelaine now part of the blend. However, much to my surprise, this was not at all what we found with our tasting.

To be fair, we were tasting wines that are still awfully youthful and young Bordeaux is not a great pleasure to taste or drink, so the younger vintages in our lineup were expected to be works in progress and one was going to need to extrapolate a bit to see what the future might hold. However, with a lineup that began with the 2014, 2013 and 2012 Château Bélair-Monange vintages (the first three to include Magdelaine in the blend) and then continued back with Magdelaine in the previous six vintages (as well as the 2008 Bélair-Monange), we felt we would get a very good feel for the evolution of the latter wine after its absorption of Magdelaine. My

expectations were of a Château Bélair-Monange that was a very good, young wine in the making and every bit as classical in style as the other wines in the Moueix family's stable of great Right Bank properties, perhaps gussied up with a bit higher percentage of new oak to try and make it a bit sexier to the more affluent class that is its target audience. But, I never expected to be presented with a modern-styled Bordeaux wine wearing a Moueix family strip label. Sadly, this is what we found at our tasting and the drastic differences between the classically-styled Magdelaines and the modern, more ham-fisted examples of Bélair-Monange was very obvious and rather disappointing.

I had not been struck particularly by a more modern style on display when I tried the early vintages of Château Bélair-Monange in the Moueix family offices in Libourne during my brief sojourn as a Bordeaux *En Primeur* participant from the 2009 through the 2012 vintages, and I can only suspect that my guard was down when running through all of the other quite traditionally-styled wines in the Moueix family stable of fine Right Bank properties and completely overlooked any telltale signs that Château Bélair-Monange was being designed to be a far more modern and spit-polished example of St. Émilion. Also, at that time, I had scant experience with the previous style of Château Bélair. One has to understand that Château Bélair, prior to its outright purchase by the Moueix family in 2008, was one of the most traditional, idiosyncratic and soil-driven examples of Bordeaux to be found on either bank of the Gironde, and its ancient and singular style was even further out in left field stylistically than that of its next door neighbor of Château Magdelaine. Given that the Moueix family had not realized any meaningful success selling the structured and soil-driven Magdelaine during its sixty years at the helm of this property, and that Château Bélair was even more structured and soil-driven and had also been out in the wilderness of the Bordeaux market for more than half a century under its previous ownership, it is quite understandable that beginning in 2008, Château Bélair-Monange would become a very differently-styled wine from the previous iterations of Château Bélair. Just how different it would become was not readily apparent to me during those *En Primeur* tastings, but its poor showing at our recent tasting was quite self-evident.

One has to remember that the contemporary world of St. Émilion is hardly one that has been rewarding classicism in the marketplace, as Robert Parker's last fifteen years as an active wine reviewer saw him championing no shortage of modern-styled, utter mediocrities in St. Émilion, and his lack of discernment certainly spread amongst the decision-makers in the commune during that time period. Witness the promotions of both Châteaux Angélus and Pavie to the St. Émilion equivalents of First Growths (Premier Grand Cru Classé "A") in the reorganization of the rankings here in 2012, the handing over of the great property of Château Figeac into the clutches of Michel Rolland and the promotion of many other really piss poor examples of over-extracted, cookie cutter modern St. Émilions to either Premier Grand Cru or Grand Cru in the 2012 rankings. This is not the type of atmosphere where an utterly classical expression of Château Bélair-Monange was going to find immediate plaudits by the general Bordeaux market, no matter how great a wine the Moueix family might craft there in the classical mold. So, they were really confronted with either swimming upstream with an old school example of Château Bélair-Monange, or taking the easy and far more profitable way out and crafting a more modern wine here.

No matter the reasons behind the decision, our recent tasting revealed a quite modern wine made under the Château Bélair-Monange label that really was showing poorly, and beginning with the 2012 vintage, when the two properties were combined, the former Magdelaine brilliance of *terroir* is nowhere to be found in the wine today. As Château Bélair, prior to its being purchased by the Moueix family, was also one of the most *terroir*-driven wines in all of Bordeaux, and certainly the equal of its next door neighbors of Ausone and Magdelaine in terms of expressing its underlying minerality, the striking lack of any soil detail in the wines of Château Bélair-Monange from 2008, 2012, 2013 and 2014 was extremely surprising, and frankly, quite disappointing. As one very seasoned Bordeaux collector who was at our tasting succinctly commented, “it is really shame that they have made such a modern mess of Bélair-Monange.” As I mentioned already, this was hardly the result that I was expecting from our tasting. What are the characteristics that peg Château Bélair-Monange as such a modern wine? First of all, there is the fruit profile, which shows a consistent signature of black raspberry, boysenberry and what one taster called “Smith Brothers Cough Drops”. In my experience, these elements are not signature fruit tones of Château Bélair back in the day, nor of Château Magdelaine before it was served up on a platter to its next door neighbor. Clearly far riper fruit is now being picked for at Bélair-Monange, and the high octane levels of the wines bears this out. The 2014 and 2012 vintages come in at a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol (and 2012 was a very classically-inclined growing season on the Right Bank!), and the 2013 and 2008 are a full fourteen percent. Those are not reassuring alcohol levels for lovers of classical Bordeaux.

There is also a striking lack of soil signature in all of the Château Bélair-Monange vintages that we sampled at our tasting, and this is most emphatically not the case with the older vintages of Château Bélair, nor with Château Magdelaine, both of which were absolutely defined by their strong elements of minerality. This profound mineral tone in old Bélair was particularly manifest both in the aromatic and flavor profiles of the wine (young or old), as well as in the serious structural chassis that active limestone brings to the very finest, classical wines of the *Côtes* section of St. Émilion. These characteristics are sadly not to be found in any vintage of Château Bélair-Monange. Rather, the old limestone-derived structural chassis and good acidity of old Château Bélair have been replaced today by more extraction, somewhat grainy tannins (some from the significant uptick of new oak in the wine) and a lower acid, somewhat heavy-handed and dull palate impression. Some tasters may prefer this modern style of Château Bélair-Monange, as the old Bélair was certainly a bit of a “wild beast” in its youth, quite the St. Émilion outlier and not the easiest wine to understand. For example, at our tasting, the very promising 1990 Château Bélair, which was still young and a few years away from truly hitting its apogee, was dismissed out of hand by some quite seasoned Bordeaux collectors around the table (and staunch Magdelaine partisans), so the old school era here could certainly be a bit of an acquired taste. But, it was emphatically a wine of personality and vivid *terroir* back in the day, and the new Château Bélair-Monange is unquestionably a wine of cellar technique and targeted market niche. It would be a sad trade-off in my book even if Magdelaine had not been gobbled up to feed the modern guise of Château Bélair-Monange, but with the loss of Magdelaine added to the equation, Château Bélair-Monange now has to be evaluated as an unmitigated disaster.

If we turn back to the clock to the old days of both Château Bélair and Château Magdelaine, to make some comparisons between the two properties as they stood prior to the former having been fully owned by the Moueix family, it is hard not to argue that Magdelaine

was the far more refined and complete wine in that era. The Moueix family delivered sixty years of beautifully suave and classic examples of Magdelaine, loaded with the inimitable signature of *terroir* of this estate and the great potential of long and slow evolution in bottle that is the hallmark of all the great wines of the *Côtes* section of St. Émilion. In contrast, Château Bélair in its more old school days was a far more exotic, nobly rustic example of this part of St. Émilion, with a style that harkened back to an even earlier era of Right Bank wine, but which I imagine has delivered more than its fair share of brilliant wines with extended cellaring in top vintages. Readers may recall from my piece on Ausone a couple of issues back, Château Bélair was once rated ahead of Château Ausone at the end of the nineteenth century and the first couple of decades of the twentieth. In that era it was considered the finest wine in St. Émilion. My experience right now with old school Château Bélair is far from extensive, as the wine was never really much available in the Bordeaux markets here in the US back in my wine trade days, and I really had little opportunity to taste the wine when it was still owned by Madame Dubois-Challon. However, my recent experiences with the wine, which include a magical 1961, a very, very good 1976 and a really promising 1990 lead me to believe that I have been missing out on something special in St. Émilion and I will be on the lookout to broaden my experience with the old school of Château Bélair in the years to come. I would have a bit more experience, but I had bad luck with a small lot of rather ill-fated 1983 Bélair and a corked bottle of the 1979 (which was clearly excellent under the TCA), but it is a project that I will be chipping away at in the future.



But, despite my paucity of tasting experience with the past at Château Bélair, it seems pretty clear to me that one can safely say that the history of Château Magdelaine was that of the superior wine over at least the last thirty or forty years of its existence, prior to its demise after the 2011 vintage. Certainly, the issues of potential investment at the property were never as dire at Magdelaine as they were at times at Château Bélair and they never adversely impacted on potential quality. Giving up Magdelaine to make a superior Château Bélair-Monange in 2012 then becomes a more curious question, as it was not the track record of the last fifty years at the latter property that spurred on the Moueix family to subsume Magdelaine into Château Bélair-Monange, and given how the two properties had performed over that extended time frame, it becomes more and more of a mystery why the decision was taken to petition the INAO in 2012 to do away with Magdelaine. Given their market histories over the last half century, Magdelaine would have seemed like the more logical wine to retain. The Moueix family had priced Bélair-Monange higher than Magdelaine since 2008, indicating that it had higher expectations for the wine in the fullness of time, but what could have been the criteria for this, other than perhaps the supposition that using modern cellar techniques, the wine could be “elevated” in much the same way that Pavie and Angélus had been modernized in the decade before and the property might one day be modern enough for (yet another ill-conceived) promotion to the rarefied air of a Premier Grand Cru Classé “A” rating in St. Émilion.

In any event, the recent tasting of both Château Bélair-Monange and Château Magdelaine, which forms the primary foundation for this article, has shown the former property to now be one of the less than interesting modernists in the dimming firmament of St. Émilion. The wines were still quite youthful, so maybe they will improve down the road and another look back at these same vintages ten or fifteen years later might find the Château Bélair-Monange wines a bit more impressive. But, experience would not lead me to expect this, given how relatively high in octane all the vintages of the wine are and that they are already rather dull and lumbering on the palate, without the vivacity of youthful fruit that one would expect from wines at these relatively young ages, so it would be quite surprising that they would find their missing freshness and spark with further bottle age. The new oak in these vintages of Château Bélair-Monange is also quite a bit in the way, and though it does not stick out as sloppily as it does in some of the very poorly-made modern wines of St. Émilion, it too seems likely to be an impediment for future evolution in a dramatically more positive direction. All of these less than promising attributes for long-term aging of Château Bélair-Monange really stand out strikingly when one reaches back to the 2011 Magdelaine and starts to see what an elegant, classical and soil-driven example of young, *Côtes* St. Émilion should properly show at this early stage in its development. The case for a quick divorce has never been more obvious or just.

The following notes include all of the wines that we gathered together for our recent comparison of Châteaux Bélair-Monange and Magdelaine. Many thanks to Tom Reddick for supplying so many of the younger vintages. Other attendees at the tasting decided it would be more fun to drink older Magdelaine after we had worked through the young wines, and hence why our recent tasting lineup includes so many more vintages of Magdelaine. I have augmented the notes from the tasting with both other older vintages of Magdelaine that I have tasted in recent times (as I do tend to drink more Magdelaine these days than almost any other claret), as well as the couple of notes I have on the old school Château Bélair. I hope in the future to have the opportunity to increase dramatically my notes on older vintages of Château Bélair and

perhaps write a proper historical feature on the exotic, funky and very traditionally-styled wines that were made at this estate back in the old days, as my gut feeling right now is that there is a lot more there than is currently understood in the Bordeaux market in general and this well could be another buried gem, much as Magdelaine was a decade or two ago.

2014 Château Bélair-Monange

The 2014 vintage I have been told is the second coming of the balanced and elegant 2008 vintage, but this is the only example I have tasted thus far from '14 and it is quite disappointing. It comes in listed at a hefty 14.5 percent alcohol and is neither balanced nor elegant, offering up a ripe and jammy nose of black raspberries, boysenberry, cigar ash, dark chocolate, smoke and plenty of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, fairly heavy-handed in style and overtly hot on the backend, with firm, fairly coarse tannins and a long, ripe and alcoholic finish. Fairly dense and utterly pedestrian juice. 2030-2080. **86.**

2013 Château Bélair-Monange

Happily, the 2013 vintage of Bélair-Monange is a tick lower on the octane scale, coming in listed at fourteen percent and it has a modicum more refinement as a result. The bouquet is virtually identical to the 2014 version, offering up scents of black raspberries, cigar smoke, nutty new oak and cigar ash. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite primary, with a good core, fine length and grip and a firmly tannic finish. This is quite flat on the palate and seems already somewhat stillborn; it is hard to imagine it ever developing any true complexity and its absence of soil tones is telling. But, at least it is not hot on the backend. 20230-2080. **87.**

2012 Château Bélair-Monange

The 2012 vintage was quite classical in style on the Right Bank, but somehow this wine comes in listed at 14.5 percent octane and is again a bit hot on the backend. I remember really liking this wine during my last round of *En Primeur* tastings, but I do not like it at all today. The bouquet has the same cookie-cutter mix of boysenberry, black raspberry, cigar smoke and toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and fairly extracted in personality, with a good core, firm, gritty tannins and decent length on the flat and rather lifeless and slightly warm finish. This wine has taken a turn I never would have expected. 2028-2070. **87.**

2011 Château Magdelaine

By this point in the tasting, I was really starting to wonder about my palate, but with the 2011 Magdelaine, it was easy to see that the problem was the three previous vintages of Bélair-Monange, not my palate. The 2011 Magdelaine is a ripe wine, as this was a drought vintage, and comes in at a pretty robust fourteen percent octane, but here there is balance, refinement and underlying mineral drive that is sorely missing in the above wines. The bouquet offers up a very youthful blend of black cherries, chalky minerality, menthol, cigar wrapper, a touch of fresh herbs and a nice foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core, superb soil signature, firm, fine-grained tannins and a long, focused and very well-balanced finish. This will be lovely juice in the fullness of time. 2027-2080+. **92+.**

2010 Château Magdelaine

The 2010 Château Magdelaine is a paradigm of restraint for the vintage, but still a pretty ripe wine and not my favorite from this property in the last decade of its existence. However, it comes in listed at fourteen percent and handles its ripeness quite well (and better than the 2009), offering up a youthful nose of black cherries, cigar smoke, a fine base of chalky minerality, tobacco leaf, a whisper of herb tones and a judicious framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the

wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit chewy on the backend, with a rock solid core, quite good soil elements for the vintage, firm tannins and a long, really quite well-balanced finish. This is a very good 2010. 2030-2075+. **91.**

2009 Château Magdelaine

The 2009 vintage of Magdelaine is riper and more roasted in profile than the 2010, coming in at a full 14.5 percent octane, and for the first half hour it was open, I really did not like this wine at all. It seems blowsy, roasted and heady, but then the minerality started to mount and the fruit seemingly freshened perceptibly, and by the end, I was far more favorably inclined towards this vintage of Magdelaine than I ever thought I would be at the outset. It is still a wine quite marked by its torrid vintage characteristics, offering up a deep, ripe and roasted nose of black cherries, a bit of black raspberry, cigar wrapper, plenty of menthol, a solid base of soil and a discreet touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full and quite broad-shouldered for Magdelaine, with a rock solid core, fine length and grip and a long, ripely tannic and surprisingly well-balanced finish. In the end, this handles its octane quite well and will probably age into a very good bottle, but it needs time to settle in and truly start to blossom. 2032-2090. **91.**

2008 Château Bélair-Monange

I had pretty high expectations for the 2008 Château Bélair-Monange, as this is one of my absolute favorite recent vintages in Bordeaux and as the inaugural year under the full control of the Moueix family, I thought they might have been aiming for something special. The wine is indeed a step up from the troika from 2012 to 2014, but still a vintage of Bélair-Monange that is strikingly devoid of any soil signature on either the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up scents of red and black cherries, black raspberries, tobacco leaf, cigar smoke and nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and better balanced than the later vintages, with suave tannins and good length and grip on the spit-polished and slightly simple finish. This is a well-done, modern example of St. Émilien and it only really fails when one starts looking for soil nuance, as this is, after all, from one of the best *terroirs* in all of Bordeaux! But, there is no soil here. 2028-2070. **89.**

2008 Château Magdelaine

My favorite recollection of the 2008 Magdelaine dates back to the first time I had a chance to taste the wine, during a weekend layover at Château Prieuré-Lichine, where I was staying in one of the rooms on my own until I could finish up my cellar visits at the start of the following week. I had about fifteen different 2008s to work on over the weekend, and had them open to taste when the only other journalist staying over the weekend here, Michel Bettane, walked through the kitchen to say hello prior to his going out to dinner that Saturday evening. I offered Michel the chance to try any or all of the wines, so he grabbed a glass and poured the Trotanoy and gave it a quick assessment, but passed on tasting the Magdelaine that stood next to it. I ended up drinking the Magdelaine with the lamb chops I was preparing. The 2008 has always been a brilliant Magdelaine to my palate, and this impression was shared by one and all at our tasting this past May, as the wine was really showing beautifully on both the nose and palate. It is still a very young wine, but it is starting to really show all of its layers, wafting from the glass in a vibrant blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar wrapper, menthol, a gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, woodsmoke and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with fine-grained tannins, marvelous transparency and a very long, very refined and tangy finish. Quintessential Magdelaine- just add a modicum of additional patience! 2030-2100. **95.**



2007 Château Magdelaine

I had never previously tasted the 2007 Château Magdelaine and found it to be a good, solid wine, with a pretty personality, albeit without quite the breadth of aromatic and flavor complexity one finds in a better vintage. The bouquet is quite open, offering up scents of red and black cherries, a touch of leafy herb tones, chocolate, cigar wrapper, chalky soil elements and a bit of toasty oak. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and complex, with good focus and grip, modest tannins and a long, tasty finish. This is really not bad to drink today, and perhaps a bit more complexity will emerge with further bottle age and my score will seem a bit conservative. 2019-2045+. **89.**

2006 Château Magdelaine

The 2006 vintage of Magdelaine is quite closed down today and currently still in its dumb phase, but there are good constituent components here and I have faith that this is going to be a very good wine in the fullness of time. The bouquet is reserved, but also deep and promised to be quite pure when it again blossoms, offering up scents today of black cherries, dark berries, cigar ash, tobacco leaf, menthol, soil and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and adolescently complex, with a good core, firm, but well-integrated tannins and fine length and grip on the still fairly reticent finish. This should be quite good when it starts to stir. 2030-2075. **91+.**

2001 Château Magdelaine

The 2001 vintage of Magdelaine is still a young wine and not yet ready for primetime drinking, but it is going to be excellent in due course. The bouquet is starting to blossom beautifully, offering up a complex constellation of sweet dark berries, black cherries, cigar smoke, menthol, a refined base of limestone, a dollop of fresh herbs and a discreet foundation of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully transparent in personality, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, moderate tannins and impressive grip on the long and complex finish. This is probably five or six years from really hitting its stride and should age very long and gracefully. Fine juice. 2024-2080. **94.**

1999 Château Magdelaine

Château Magdelaine was one of the properties in St. Émilion that was able to harvest their grapes ahead of the worst rains of September of 1999 and the wine is one of the best of the vintage as a result. It is still a tad youthful and primary in profile, but is blossoming nicely and should really start to hit its plateau of peak maturity in another few years. The wine delivers a lovely nose of red and black cherries, cigar ash, a touch of menthol, lovely, chalky soil tones, a gentle base of vanillin oak and a gentle topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and nicely soil-driven, with a very respectable core of fruit (particularly for the vintage), fine balance and a long, gently tannic finish. This wine is still a bit monolithic and should snap into more precise focus with just a bit more bottle age. A fine success for a difficult vintage. 2021-2050. **89+.**

1998 Château Magdelaine

This most recent bottle of the 1998 Magdelaine was the finest I have yet tasted and it seems quite clear to me that this is one of the legendary vintages that this iconic estate has ever produced. This is a very, very deep example of Magdelaine, offering up a spectacular young bouquet of red and black cherries, menthol, mint, a touch of nutskin, Valrhona chocolate, cigar ash, limestone soil elements and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and absolutely rock solid at the core, with great focus and grip, suave, fine-grained tannins and a very, very long, pure and vibrant finish. This is a great young vintage of Magdelaine. 2030-2100. **97.**

1995 Château Magdelaine (served from magnum)

I do not drink enough 1995 Right Bank wines, but the last two I have drunk (Figeac and Magdelaine) have been simply stellar. Out of magnum, the 1995 Magdelaine is still a tad on the young side, but it is so well-balanced that it is already a pleasure. The bouquet is deep and very classy, offering up a classical and quite sappy blend of red and black cherries, nutskin, cigar wrapper, a fine base of limestone, a touch of new oak and a gentle topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with a rock solid core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins, tangy acids and excellent focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. In magnum, this is still a puppy, but in bottle, I suspect it might be starting to stir from hibernation. 2025-2080. **93+.**

1994 Château Magdelaine

The 1994 vintage of Magdelaine is a touch four-square in personality, but otherwise a very satisfying example of this difficult year. The nose offers up a black fruity mix of cassis, black cherries, menthol, cigar ash, chalky, smoke and a bit of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pretty deep, full and complex, with modest tannins, good balance and a long, complex but slightly boxy finish. This is not bad, but the more delicately styled 1992 is a step up in terms of breed and balance. 2019-2045. **88.**

1992 Château Magdelaine

The 1992 Magdelaine is a beautiful middleweight vintage for this fine property. The bouquet is bright, complex and quite classy, wafting from the glass in a blend of cherries, sweet dark berries, a touch of blood orange, cigar smoke, nutskin, limestone minerality, a whisper of new oak and a topnote of menthol. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nicely tangy, with good intensity of flavor, fine focus and complexity and a long, modestly tannic and quite lovely finish. This is a lighter vintage, but also a quite complete Magdelaine in its own way. 2019-2050+. **91.**

1990 Château Bélair

The wines of Château Bélair no longer exist in their old, completely soil-driven and exotic style of yesteryear, as the new regime here after the Moueix family purchased the estate in 2006 has completely revamped and gussied up the style of the new Château Bélair-Monange and the two wines bear absolutely no family resemblance could come from completely different corners of Bordeaux. However, back in the old days, there was something utterly unique and compelling about the wines from Château Bélair and this 1990 is a stellar example of the old school style here. The wine here is still quite youthful for a 1990 and needs some extended aeration to start to stir aromatically, but in due course offers up a very complex and pure bouquet of red and black cherries, a touch of paraffin, bonfires, lovely salinity to its limestone soil component, menthol and a touch of baking spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and one hundred percent soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, ripe tannins and a long, focused and tangy finish. This is still early days for the 1990 Bélair, but it is a superb wine that is going to be a great drink in a few more years' time. 2025-275+. **93+.**

1990 Château Magdelaine

(At our comparison of Bélair-Monange and Magdelaine, the bottle of 1990 Magdelaine was slightly forward and soft, so I have substituted my most recent previous note from a pristine bottle). The 1990 Magdelaine is a flat out brilliant bottle of wine that delivers much the same aromatic and flavor fireworks of the 1990 Figeac, albeit in a potentially more transparent and ethereal package than the Figeac. The celestial bouquet soars from the glass in a mélange of cherries, toasted nuts, menthol, tobacco leaf, beautiful herb tones, chalky soil nuances and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, elegant and refined, with great intensity of flavor, laser-like focus, ripe and supple tannins, and endless length on the long, complex and suave finish. While the '90 Magdelaine is already a great glass of wine, I would still try and give it at least another eight to ten years of cellaring to really let it blossom fully. Believe me, I will not be touching any of mine until a decade has passed. It is a great bottle in the making and drinking well enough right now that it is no crime to be opening it, if one has sufficient quantity in the cellar. I should note that the bottle at our March vertical was not quite up to the quality of previous incarnations, but I put this down to a less than perfect example. 2015-2060. **95.**

1988 Château Magdelaine

I have had a couple of bottles of the 1988 Magdelaine recently, with one showing quite open and starting to really deliver, while the second bottle was still a bit tight and bound up in its structural elements and remained surprisingly reticent over the several hours we followed it in decanter. My gut instinct is that a couple more years in the cellar is probably warranted for the wine, with my wide open bottle perhaps having been stored a bit warmer somewhere along the way. The bouquet on both bottles was outstanding, offering up a classically perfumed bouquet of

cherries, plums, violets, cigar ash, a touch of menthol and that beautiful Magdelaine signature of chalky soil. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and has lovely sweetness at the core, with great mineral drive, tangy acids, still a bit of backend tannin and a long, complex and promising finish. I am down to three or four bottles of this in my cellar, so I am not going to open another bottle for at least five years, despite it being accessible today. I just have the feeling the wine is still climbing and a bit more patience will be rewarded. 2019-2045+. **91+**.

1985 Château Magdelaine

The 1985 Magdelaine seems to get better every time I taste it and this most recent bottle was certainly firing on all cylinders. The bouquet is very pure, very precise and marvelously complex, delivering a stellar combination of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, menthol, sealing was, a touch of mint, a gorgeously complex base of limestone minerality and a deft framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully vibrant and tangy, with a superb core, great mineral drive, modest tannins and a very, very long, refined and electric finish. Truly brilliant and timeless juice. 2019-2080. **96+**.



1983 Château Bélair

It seemed that it was very hard to cross paths with a good example of the 1983 Château Bélair in preparation for this report, as I had to open all four bottles from a small auction lot that I purchased last year to find a sound bottle of this wine. Out of the four, two of the bottles were corked and one was oxidized, but the fourth was a very nice wine that showed off all of the

rather idiosyncratic style of Bélair in this era, but eventually offered up a complex and quite sophisticated glass of claret. The bouquet (after some rather extended aeration) offers up a lovely blend of red and black cherries, nutskins, complex, autumnal soil tones, coffee, menthol, candle wax and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and very soil-driven, with a lovely core of fruit, modest tannins, bright acids and very fine length and grip on the still quite youthful finish. Like its next door neighbor, Château Ausone, the Bélair wines from this era are very tightly-knit out of the blocks and take an extended period to really blossom when opened. The very unique (and rather funky) blend of candle wax, dusty soil tones and overt nuttiness that defines Bélair in this era is easily mistaken for corkiness (as was the case with the one good bottle of this wine that we had at our tasting- served hard on the heels of a bottle that was clearly TCA-tainted, it is not too surprising that many folks thought this bottle was also corked!) if one does not have the patience to let the wine open up with air. I can understand why this style of Bélair had a hard time finding a wider audience, but this is really a lovely vintage for the estate- if one can get luckier than I with provenance! 2018-2050+. **90.**

1976 Château Bélair

The 1976 vintage is one of the great years of this decade at Château Ausone and, with Pascal Delbeck making the wines at both Ausone and Château Bélair in this era, it is not surprising that the 1976 is also very, very strong at Bélair. As I mentioned in the introduction, I do not have anywhere near as much experience as I would like with old school Château Bélair as I would like, but I have to believe the exotic and slightly rustic style of the 1976 is very much emblematic of this property back in the day. The bouquet is initially pretty tight and needs some time to blossom in decanter, but eventually does so and offers up a very complex blend of black cherries, nutskin, meaty overtones, chocolate, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very, very soil-driven in personality, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent complexity and grip, melted tannins and a very long, very transparent and satisfying finish. This is not the most elegant wine one can find in the pantheon of St. Émilion, but it is very complex and absolutely loaded with personality. 2019-2050. **91.**

1975 Château Magdelaine

At our recent tasting, the 1975 Magdelaine really showed beautifully and it seems that the wine is now truly into its apogee of peak maturity. The bouquet is gorgeous and very precise today, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, blood orange, a touch of menthol, very pure limestone minerality, cigar smoke, lovely savory elements and hints of both nutskin and sealing wax in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very transparent in profile, with a fine core of fruit, melting tannins and a very long, soil-driven and complex finish. The balance on this is seamless and the wine is just a classic example of this magical *terroir*. 2019-2050+. **94.**

1970 Château Bélair

The 1970 Château Bélair is one of the most backward wines of the vintage, and believe it or not, at age forty-nine, it is still not really ready to drink! The only other example of the vintage that is like this wine is the 1970 Lafleur, which also is still chewy, youthful and moderately bound up in its structure. With some extended aeration, the wine starts to stir a bit and eventually offers up a deep and fairly primary bouquet of black cherries, gamebird, a touch of menthol, cigar ash, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very solid still at the core, with very good length and grip, still a bit of chewy tannin and a long, nobly rustic and soil-driven finish. My impression is that this is not quite as complete as Bélair

from the vintages after Pascal Delbeck arrived in 1975, but it is still quite a good wine and may end up one day fully blossoming into something outstanding! 2019-2050+. **88+?**

1970 Château Magdelaine

Our first bottle of the 1970 at our recent May tasting was corked, but happily we had a backup bottle. However, as it was pressed into service promptly, it did not get much time in decanter to blossom properly and my score may be a bit conservative because of this lack of aeration. The bouquet is pure and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, sweet dark berries, cigar ash, woodsmoke, sealing wax, a lovely base of chalk and still a touch of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully resolved, with a good core, melted tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the very well balanced finish. A lovely bottle, but I have had even better ones in recent times and this again, my just reflect our not being able to give this bottle enough time to completely blossom. 2019-2050. **93.**

1961 Château Bélair (Nicolas Bottling)

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

CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINE INDEX SUMMER OF 2019



Non-Champagne Sparkling Wines

Domaine de Bellivière- Éric Nicolas (Jasnières)- *Les P'tits Vélos Non Dosé;*

Charles Bove (Vouvray)- *Touraine "Methode Traditionelle" Brut Rosé NV;*

Xavier, Kerrie et Anke de Boissieu- *"Granit" Réserve de Lavernette Brut Nature;*

Claude et Sébastien Branger (Muscadet)- *Éclipse Methode Traditionnelle Brut NV;*

Domaine Brigand- *2014 Crémant de Bourgogne "Carte d'Or" Brut;*

Monzio Compagnoni- *2013 Franciacorta "Saten";*

Bruno Danguin- *Crémant de Bourgogne "Cuvée Blanche" Blanc de Noirs Brut NV, Crémant de Bourgogne "le Grand Classique" Brut NV, 2016 Crémant "Préstige de Constance" Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut, 2015 Crémant de Bourgogne "Confrérie" Brut Rosé;*

Maison Foucher- *Crémant de Loire "Cuvée des Roys de Naples" Brut NV;*

Bertrand Galbrun (Bourgueil)- *Troglos Sparkling Vin de France NV;*

Domaine Huët (Vouvray)- *2014 Vouvray Pétillant Brut;*

Peter Jakob Kühn (Rüdesheim)- *2013 Spätburgunder Sparkling Brut Rosé, 2012 Riesling Sekt Brut;*

Benoît et Julie Mérias (Montlouis)- *Montlouis "la Methode Traditionnelle" Brut NV;*

Domaine Albert Mann (Alsace)- 2016 *Crémant d'Alsace Extra Brut*;
Domaine Mittnacht Frères (Alsace)- *Crémant d'Alsace Extra Brut NV*;
Domaine Pfister (Alsace)- 2015 *Crémant d'Alsace Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*; 2012 *Crémant d'Alsace Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*;
Domaine François Pinon (Vouvray)- 2016 *Vouvray Pétillant*; 2014 *Vouvray Pétillant Brut*;
Piper-Sonoma (Sonoma)- *Brut NV*, *Brut Rosé NV*;
Damien et Didier Richou (Anjou)- *Les "D" En Bulles Vin de Table Brut Nature NV*;
Domaine de la Taille aux Loups- Jacky Blot (Montlouis)- *Montlouis Pétillant "Triple Zero"*;
Chateau Tour Grise (Saumur)- 2004 *Saumur "Non-Dosé" Brut Nature*;
Céline et Laurent Tripoz (Mâcon)- 2016 *Fleur d'Aligoté Crémant*; 2012 *Crémant de Bourgogne "Préstige" Brut Nature (magnum)*;
Xavier Weisskopf (Montlouis)- 2014 *Le Rocher des Violettes Pétillant Originel*;

Champagne

Agrapart (Avize)- *"Les 7 Crus" Extra Brut NV*;
Ayala (Aÿ)- 2012 *"Le Blanc de Blancs" Brut Millésime*;
Champagne Barnaut (Bouzy)- *"Grande Réserve" Brut NV*; *"Quintessence du Pinot Noir" Blanc de Noirs Brut NV*; *Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Released in 2014)*; *Authentique" Brut Rosé NV*;
Herbert Beaufort (Bouzy)- *"les Facettes" 1er Cru" Brut Réserve NV*; *Blanc de Noirs "Grand Cru" Brut NV*;
Billecart-Salmon (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- 1999 *"Cuvée Nicolas François" Brut Millésime*;
Bollinger (Aÿ)- 2004 *"R.D." Brut Millésime*;
Cédric Bouchard (Celles-sur-Ource)- 2011 *Blanc de Noirs "les Ursules" Extra Brut*;
Bernard Brémont (Ambonnay)- *Brut NV*; *Brut Rosé NV*;
Champagne Corbon(Avize)- 2009 *"les Bacchantes" Blanc de Blancs Brut*; 2007 *"Grande Millésime" Blanc de Blancs Brut*;
R. H. Coutier (Ambonnay)- *"Cuvée Tradition" Brut NV*; *"Cuvée Rosé" Brut NV*;
Jérôme Dehours (Mareuil le Port)- *"Trio S" Brut NV*;
Demièrre-Ansiot (Oger)- *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*;
Champagne Doyard (Vertus)- *"Cuvée Vendémiaire" Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*;
Alexandre Filaine (Damery)- *"Cuvée Spéciale" Brut NV*; 2011 *"Sensuum Vertigo" Brut Millésime*;
Champagne Gallois (Vertus)- *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*;
Gatinois (Aÿ)- *"Brut Tradition" NV*; *Brut Rosé NV*;
Alfred Gratien (Épernay)- *Brut NV*; *Brut Rosé NV*;
Grongnet (Étoges)- *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*;
Charles Heidsieck (Reims)- 1995 *"Blanc des Millénaires" Brut Millésime*;
Henriot (Reims)- *Blanc de Blancs Brut NV*; *"Brut Souverain" NV*; *"Cuve 38" Brut NV*; *Brut Rosé NV*; 2008 *Brut Millésime*; 2005 *Henriot "Cuvée Hemera" Brut Millésime*;
Jacquesson (Dizy)- *"Cuvée No. 741" Extra Brut NV*; *"Cuvée No. 742" Extra Brut NV*; 2008 *"Avize- Champ Caïn" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut*; 2008 *"Dizy Corne Bautray" Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut*; 2008 *"Aÿ- Vauzelle Terme" Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut*;
Janisson-Baradon et Fils (Épernay)- *"Sélection" Brut NV*; *"Grande Réserve" Brut NV*;

Krug (Reims)- *Grande Cuvée “167^{ème} Édition” Brut NV; Rosé “23^{ème} Édition” Brut NV; Rosé “22^{ème} Édition” Brut NV; 1996 Vintage Brut;*

Lancelot-Pienne (Cramant)- *Blanc de Blancs “Table Ronde” Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; Blanc de Blancs “Instant Présent” Brut NV; “Accord Majeur” Brut NV;*

Laherte Frères (Chavot)- *Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV; “Ultradition Brut” NV; “les Longues Voyes” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV; “Rosé de Meunier” Extra Brut NV;*

Lanson (Reims)- *2000 Brut Millésime;*

Larmandier-Bernier (Vertus)- *“Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Longitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; 2012 “Terre de Vertus” Blanc de Blanc Brut Nature; 2004 “V. V. de Cramant” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut;*

Domaine Georges Laval(Cumières)- *“Cumières” Brut Nature NV; 2014 “Cumières” Brut Nature Millésime (jeroboam)*

Lilbert-Fils (Cramant)- *Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Base Year 2014); Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Base Year 2015); Perle “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Base Year 2013); Perle “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Base Years 2014 and 2015); 2013 Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut;*

Nicolas Maillart (Écueil)- *“Platine” Brut NV;*

Marguet Père et Fils (Ambonnay)- *“Shaman 15” Brut Nature NV; “Shaman 16” Rosé Brut Nature NV; 2014 “les Bermonts” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature; 2014 “le Parc” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature; 2014 “Saints-Rémys” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature; 2013 “Ambonnay” Brut Nature; 2013 “Bouzy” Brut Nature; 2009 “Sapience” Brut Nature; 2014 “Ambonnay” Rosé Brut Nature Millésime;*

Moët et Chandon (Épernay)- *2008 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime; 1999 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime;*

Pierre Moncuit (Mesnil sur Oger)- *Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV; “Grand Cru” Rosé Brut NV;*

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

Moutardier (Le Breuil)- *“Pure Meunier” Brut Nature NV;*

Mouzon-Leroux (Verzy)- *“l’Atavique” Extra Brut NV;*

Philipponnat (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)- *“Royale Réserve” Brut NV; “Royale Réserve Rosé” Brut NV; 2012 Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime; 2008 “Cuvée 1522” Extra Brut Millésime; 2006 “Le Léon” Extra Brut Millésime; 2010 Clos des Goisses; 2009 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 2008 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 2006 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 2000 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 1996 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 1993 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 1989 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 1982 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 1976 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses; 2008 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”; 2007 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”; 2006 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”; 2005 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”; 2002 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”; 2000 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”; 1999 Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”;*

Ployez-Jacquemart (Ludes)- *“Extra Quality” Brut NV; Extra Brut Rosé NV; 2008 Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime; 2012 Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime; 2008 “Extra Brut Vintage”; 2000 “Liesse d’Harbonville” Brut;*

Pol Roger (Épernay)- *2006 Brut Rosé Millésime;*

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

Éric Rodez (Ambonnay)- *“Cuvée des Crayères” Brut NV; Blanc de Noirs Brut NV;*

Marquis de Sade- Michel Gonet (Mesnil-sur-Oger)- *Brut NV;*

Frédéric Savart (Écueil)- *“l’Accomplie” Extra Brut NV;*

Camille Savès (Bouzy)- *“Carte d’Or” Brut NV; “les Loges” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV;*
Jean-Marc Sélèque (Pierry)- *“Solessence Nature” Brut Nature NV; “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV; “Solessence” Extra Brut NV; “Solessence” Extra Brut Rosé; 2013 “Partition” Extra Brut;*
Le Brun Servenay (Avize)- *“Mélodie en C” Extra Brut NV;*
Champagne Suenen (Cramant)- *“Oiry” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; “C + C” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV; 2012 “les Robarts” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut;*
Taittinger (Reims)- *“Folies de la Marquetterie” Brut NV; 1996 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs; 1995 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs; 1990 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs;*
Champagne Tarlant (Oeuilly)- *“Brut Réserve” NV;*
Vouette et Sorbée (Buxières-sur-Arce)- *“Blanc de Argile” Extra Brut NV;*
Marie Weiss (Ludes)- *Brut NV;*

**RECENTLY-TASTED CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINES
INCLUDING A DEEP AND WIDE VERTICAL OF CLOS DES GOISSES**



This new report on Champagne and Sparkling Wines has been in the works over the last several months, as readers may recall that I simply did not have enough time or space in my most recent article on the Loire Valley to include all of the fine sparklers from that region, and have had those bottles waiting in the wings for this next report on sparkling wines. Similarly, examples of both Crémant d’Alsace and Crémant de Bourgogne that arrived as samples for features on Alsace and the Mâconnais in the last couple of newsletters also were not reviewed at that time, so I was working on a nice backlog of sparklers from beyond the confines of the Champagne region prior to getting to work on my bi-annual report on the world’s finest sparkling wine region. Consequently, this article covers a bit more ground than is customary in many of these features and is all the richer for that, as there are some really lovely sparkling wines being made from beyond the rolling chalk hillsides of Champagne proper. Of course, I do not count the seemingly ubiquitous wines of Prosecco in this generalization, as the mystifying and surging popularity of this sparkling wine still seems incongruous to me, as I have yet to taste any example of Prosecco that was even remotely complex or compelling to me. Admittedly, I try to give them a pretty wide berth, so I have not tasted deeply at the Prosecco well and there may well be exceptional examples out there, but my gut instinct is simply that this is not the case. With so many truly exciting, well-made and very fairly-priced sparkling wines from regions like Alsace, greater Burgundy or the Loire Valley to try, not to mention beautiful bottles of Cava and

some of the really good sparklers made on the west coast of the US (all of which are fermented in their bottles naturally to provide the bubbles), why anyone would opt for Prosecco and its pumped in carbon dioxide gas is still a question I cannot answer.

This Champagne section of this spring report was broadened dramatically when I had the chance to attend an outstanding vertical tasting dinner of Champagne Philipponnat's flagship single vineyard *Tête de Cuvée*, Clos des Goisses, this past April in New York. The *maison's* CEO, Charles Philipponnat was on hand to host our tasting, which was co-organized by The Rare Wine Company and Daniel Johnnes' *La Fête du Champagne*, and it was truly a remarkable evening. As I had written an historical feature on the beautiful Clos des Goisses back in the autumn of 2014 (Issue 53 for those who would like to refresh their memories of this wine's long history in the Philipponnat stables), I have not done a separate feature on Clos des Goisses in this issue, but simply included my notes from this magical evening in the article that follows. The tasting was remarkable for not only debuting the not yet released, but absolutely delicious 2010 vintage of Clos des Goisses and the soon to be released, legend in the making, 2008 Clos des Goisses "Juste Rosé", but also for including virtually every vintage of the Juste Rosé ever made since Charles Philipponnat launched this new bottling in the 1999 vintage. As we also went back all the way to the brilliant 1976 Clos des Goisses over the course of the evening, I have made dedicated sections for both the vintages of Clos des Goisses and its companion Juste Rosé in the vintage-dated section of the Champagne coverage, with a brief historical sketch of the two cuvées included as preambles for each section, but refer readers back to Issue 53 for a more thorough historical discussion of the beautiful vineyard of Clos des Goisses and its association with Champagne Philipponnat, which dates back to the very first vintage of this flagship wine in 1935.

Beyond the wide variety of non-Champagne sparkling wines and Clos des Goisses covered in this issue, there is also a very good spread of new releases and older bottlings of Champagne from some of my favorite producers in the region. As I now write these Champagne features at least twice a year, I hop around a bit in terms of which wines are covered, as I tend to canvass importers and distributors, or the Champagne houses New York-based "brand ambassadors" to accrue a properly broad spread of samples, and once the pile of bottles looks intimidating enough to pose a challenge to it being tasted and written up before the new issue's deadline, I stop seeking out samples. So, while this issue contains plenty of favorites who have been featured prominently in these bi-annual features, some *maisons* have been left for the next installment, as I simply cannot cover everyone in one article in this dynamic wine-producing region. One wine that I am very sorry has not yet been covered is Krug's 2004 vintage from their Clos du Mesnil vineyard, as I have somehow not timed my sample requests to line up with when there are a few bottles available for journalists here in New York, and have not crossed paths with it at any of the events I have attended since its release a few months ago. I will continue to look forward to tasting it sometime in the not too distant future, but perhaps when it comes to Clos du Mesnil, our stars are no longer in alignment. But, with all the other stellar bottles covered in the following pages, its absence is not as keenly felt as one might think, as there are dozens and dozens of absolutely beautiful bottles of Champagne currently in the market. As I have written *ad nauseum* in past iterations of these reports, if you are not actively buying and cellaring Champagne at the present time, you are missing out on a "golden age" for the region akin to what California was going through in the decade of the 1970s with cabernet sauvignon or

Bordeaux went through in the decade of the 1980s and you are very, very likely to regret your oversight in the years to come. Champagne is one of the consistently most age-worthy wines produced anywhere in the world and it deserves to be treated properly in this regard, with bottles purchased and laid down for five to ten years of bottle age, allowing the secondary and tertiary layers of complexity to fully emerge, the sometimes taut structural elements to relax and blossom and the wines to fully come into their own. If you happen to be one of those collectors that relies on what is currently available in the market for your Champagne needs and drink primarily the wines that are presently on your merchant's shelves, you are missing out on a very real opportunity.



When it comes to buying and laying down Champagne in my own cellar, I was slow to get off the mark and have only really been doing this for the last decade or so and, consequently, I fully understand those who have not yet started devoting a portion of their cellar to aging Champagne. But, ten years out from starting to put bottles away for the long haul, I have come to fully appreciate just how much more is available in these wines with extended bottle age. While a great many of the most serious producers in Champagne age their wines for quite extended periods on their fine lees prior to disgorgement and release into the market, it is a very serious drain on cash flow to do this and very few Champagne houses can age wines as long as they really need to reach their peaks before they release them into the market. Even a wine like Louis Roederer's Cristal, which now is spending nearly ten years in the cellars here prior to disgorgement and release, is still very much a young wine when a new vintage is first unleashed

into the market and its apogee is still a decade or two down the road from its initial release. While this may seem self-evident with *Tête de Cuvées* such as Cristal and the like, it is also very much true of even non-vintage bottlings that are released still many years ahead of their primes. This is particularly true of many of the smaller grower Champagnes we see today, as a great many of these producers are first generation when it comes to bottling and selling the vast majority of their production, and they have not yet had the possibility of building up sufficient cellar stocks to age their non-vintage wines as long as they feel would be ideal. So, if you want to support your favorite *vignerons* in the region and drink their wines at their peaks, you have to be prepared to start buying some bottles for laying down for a more extended period of time.

In the past, I have used the Burgundy analogy when discussing aging Champagne, equating the non-vintage bottlings as similar to top *villages* bottlings from top Burgundy domaines, with vintage-dated wines like top premier crus and the *Tête de Cuvées* as grand crus. I still think this is a pretty useful analogy for understanding the aging potential and the incentives inherent in properly cellaring at least some of your Champagne prior to drinking it. However, of late, I have also come to the conclusion that there is another analogy with Burgundy that applies quite well to aging Champagne, and that is how the wines evolve in a more cyclical manner over extended time, as is the case with Burgundy, rather than in the more linear fashion one might associate with Bordeaux or California cabernet sauvignon. I suppose this makes sense, as chardonnay and pinot noir are the two dominant grapes in most blends of Champagne and it is logical that bubbly made with these grapes would age similarly to how their most prestigious still wine counterparts evolve with bottle age. In both cases, the wines tend to go through open and closed phases in their evolution (again, I visualize this aging pattern as similar to those Sine and Cosine curves we learned about in introductory Algebra and Geometry way back in our school days), rather than the more standard plateau model of Bordeaux's aging cycle. Consequently, it is very easy to catch Champagne after a certain number of years in the cellar in a closed phase, where the fruit seems to collapse in on itself and more tertiary aromatic and flavor elements of nuttiness, smoke and toast coming to the fore and the wine seemingly getting to a point of decline in its evolution, as the acids seem brusque and uncovered by their closed down fruit components. In the last few years, many 1996 Champagnes have gone through this phase and the vintage has been written off as "inherently unbalanced and initially overrated" in many circles, whereas I have come to see this as just a stage of closure in their evolutionary arcs and I still have the utmost confidence in the top wines from this vintage aging for many more decades to come.

But, it is not only the vintage-dated wines that age along this curvature pattern and I feel one can see this also, to a lesser degree, in many non-vintage bottlings as well. This, of course, depends on the ultimate constitution of the non-vintage wine in question, as some are blends of a single base year, other times a base year and smaller percentages of the previous year or two, and there is also a growing trend to create a reserve wine "solera" to blend with the base year wines to add complexity and dimension to non-vintage bottlings, that is yet another variable to take into account when aging these wines. With all of these attendant variables about what might ultimately find its way into the final blend of a given wine, there are no hard and fast rules about when a non-vintage wine might go into its closed phase (or even if it will), but it still makes sense to keep this in mind when contemplating opening a non-vintage bottling that you may have tucked away in your cellar a few years ago. As I mentioned above, I am relatively new to aging

much of my Champagne in the cellar for extended periods of time, so I do not have the same feel for this as I do for wines that I have been cellaring for far longer periods of my wine collecting life, but these days, I tend to try and give my non-vintage bottlings six to seven years out from their release date in my cellar before I really start to think of drinking them and expecting to catch them at their peaks. With vintage-dated wines, the style of the vintage needs to be taken into account, but in general terms, I tend to try and drink these wines in the twelve to twenty year window out from the vintage, and many of the very best *Tête de Cuvées* are still puppies at age twenty!

I mention this because I have been seeing things written about certain vintages and/or bottlings in the press and on wine bulletin boards that strike me as not thoroughly thought through and erroneous, and perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the open and closed phasing of Champagne aging curves is not well taken into account when a person chooses to pronounce a given wine or vintage as over the hill or not up to snuff in comparison to previous iterations of the cuvée. A case in point might be what I have read recently about Krug's flagship bottling of Grande Cuvée, which has now begun to be labeled with its "Edition" number, so that collectors can track its base year and constituent components. Since the number of each edition of Grande Cuvée began to be printed on the labels, much has been made of how brilliant the "164eme Édition" of the wine was, which was based on the excellent 2008 vintage, and in comparison, how disappointing the Editions numbered 165 and 166 were after the fireworks of the Grande Cuvée "164eme Édition". I have read that some collectors are simply going to skip the wines until the "168eme Édition" of Grande Cuvée will be released, as this will be from the excellent base year of 2012, which strikes me as inane. While there are certainly subtle variations from year to year with Grande Cuvée (which is why it is interesting to know which Edition one is drinking), the house of Krug also has an unsurpassed history of a magical touch with blending and it seems to me to be intellectually rather unsophisticated to say "this edition of Grande Cuvée is great and the others are not so good" when judging the wines early on after their release. For each bottling is composed of dozens and dozens of different wines and base years, and *Chef de Cave* Éric Lebel and the rest of the "blending committee" at Krug expend countless hours in the cellars and during their blending trials to ensure that each and every release of Grande Cuvée is going to be a great bottle of Champagne and consistent from version to version in terms of absolute quality, even if there may be slight variations of style based on the specifics of each cuvée's ultimate composition.

Beyond this, there is also the consideration that Krug Grande Cuvée is one of the most ageworthy and longest-lived wines in all of Champagne, and in this regard, it seems foolish in the extreme to make broad pronouncements about the relative merits of a certain release of the wine, based on how it shows in its early days after release. Even though the wine is now starting to stretch out its time aging *sur latte* to close to a decade prior to release, each and every version of Grande Cuvée is unequivocally still a very young wine when it is first let out from the cellars in Reims and placed at the disposal of an insatiably thirsty market, and its true period of mature drinkability is still a decade or two in the future from its release date. To taste such a young wine, built for the long haul, fresh from the cellars and pronounce that it is not up to snuff flies in the face of all the long and beautiful history of how Krug Grande Cuvée is each and every year, one of Champagne's greatest bottlings and how eventually, each and every iteration finds its plateau of magic and utterly overwhelms the senses with its cornucopia of excellence. I fully

understand that a significant percentage of Krug's well-heeled clientele drinks the wine early on, as they are not into aging Champagne and are attracted to Krug for other reasons, which we might term "brand significance", but for those who aspire to a higher degree of wine collecting connoisseurship, a bit more understanding of the historical foundation of the wine, not to mention reflection about the seriousness with which the current team takes its responsibilities as caretakers of this legacy might lead one to conclude that there are no dramatic differences in quality between versions of Grande Cuvée, just gentle gradations of style from edition to edition. And, with sufficient bottle age, all of this will become apparent, if one has the patience to defer one's gratification and let the wine find one of its plateaus of maturity.

Krug Grande Cuvée is not the only wine in Champagne where there is often a rush to judgment and an urge to share one's perceptions of a given iteration, it is just one that came to my attention of late and seemed worthy of some discussion. The fact that even this iconic bottling can be misunderstood in this manner is reflective of the bigger issue that a significant percentage of the wine market really is still not particularly savvy when it comes to aging Champagne. Given that the rewards of letting these fine wines evolve and truly blossom with extended bottle age, it seems that more conversations about how it is best to maximize the quality and ultimate drinking experience of Champagne by cellaring it like other top flight wines seems likely to be an important part of the equation in the coming years, as Champagne is still in the midst of escaping from the long shadow of its extended historical period of "brand building" and being dissected more on the basis of the strength and personality of its wide, wide array of outstanding bottlings and producers. Many of these producers are relatively new, though as the trailblazing Anselme Selosse is now starting to ease into retirement and pass on the reins of his domaine to his talented son, Guillaume, we are now a full generation into the quality revolution. But, for many of the smaller *vignerons* whose talents are manifest in so many great wines arriving in the market in the recent past, one has to realize that they are still the first generation of their family to be aspiring to such heights and need to be evaluated differently than in the past. And a great many of the *Grandes Marques* are also in the midst of sea changes of a very profound and positive nature, as for example, there is no way to equate this moment in the history at Louis Roederer (as they shift the viticultural landscape of Champagne most seismically with their transition to organic and biodynamic farming) with any that has come before. As the focus of the Champagne landscape has shifted from brand to domaine, vineyard and *vigneron*, the wines from this region have never been better, and this is true from the grandest of the *Grandes Marques* to the smallest, passionate *vigneron*, and we as consumers and collectors of these beautiful wines, need to adapt our perspectives to the exciting and dramatically changing realities of Champagne. Gaining a greater appreciation of how these wines will evolve and blossom in our cellars is a very good place to begin this understanding.

Loire Valley Sparkling Wines

Les P'tits Vélos Non Dosé- Domaine de Bellivière (Éric Nicolas)

The Les P'tits Vélos from Domaine de Bellivière is the first commercially-released sparkling wine from Éric Nicolas. It is composed entirely of chenin blanc and all from the 2013 vintage, though this is not mentioned on the label. It was aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement at the end of 2017. The wine offers up a beautifully deep and complex nose of peach, quince, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and a touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite deep at the core, with lovely mineral drive,

fine focus and grip, frothy *mousse* and a very long, complex and impressively balanced finish. This is bone dry, but has excellent depth of fruit and is very well buffered and drinking with great style already. 2019-2035+. **91.**

Touraine “Methode Traditionelle” Brut Rosé NV- Charles Bove (Vouvray)

The Touraine non-vintage Brut Rosé from Charles Bove is composed of a blend of eighty percent cabernet franc and twenty percent gamay, all grown on limestone soils. The wine is aged eighteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The current release is a lovely salmon color and offers up a beautiful bouquet of watermelon, a touch of rhubarb, rye bread, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a touch of orange peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and complex, with bright acids, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the vibrant finish. Like many Loire sparklers made predominantly with cabernet franc, I think this wine works best at the table, where it really shines. This is very well-made and a superb value! 2019-2030. **88+.**

Crémant de Loire “Cuvée des Roys de Naples” Brut NV- Maison Foucher

The Crémant de Loire “Cuvée des Roys de Naples” non-vintage Brut bottling from Maison Foucher is composed of a blend of fifty percent chenin blanc and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot noir. The *vins clairs* do not undergo malo and the wine spends twenty-four months aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The current release offers up a bright and nicely complex nose of lemon, quince, flinty minerality, a touch of bread dough and a topnote of citrus zest. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, bright and bouncy finish. This is a very good Loire sparkler and a fine value. 2019-2030+. **88.**

Éclipse Methode Traditionnelle Brut NV- Claude et Sébastien Branger (Muscadet)

The current release of Éclipse Methode Traditionnelle Brut from Claude and Sébastien Branger is from the 2015 vintage and was bottled in May of 2016, after nine months aging. It is composed entirely of Melon de Bourgogne and spent just short of two years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. The wine offers up a bright and complex nose of breadfruit, ocean breeze, stony soil tones, gentle leesiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and soil-driven, with frothy *mousse*, good focus and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. This is not the most complex of Loire Valley sparklers, but it has depth and mineral drive and really works nicely at the table. 2019-2030. **87.**

“Granit” Réserve de Lavernette Brut Nature- Xavier, Kerrie et Anke de Boissieu

The “Granit” Réserve de Lavernette from the de Boissieu family is composed entirely of gamay. The new release is from the 2015 vintage and was disgorged in November of 2018. The wine delivers a vibrant and classy nose of peach, apple, a beautiful blade of minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is frothy, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, fine mineral drive and a long, impressively complex finish. This is lovely juice, but really made for the table, rather than as an aperitif (at least to my palate). 2019-2025. **88.**

Troglos Sparkling Vin de France NV- Bertrand Galbrun (Bourgueil)

The Troglos Sparkling Vin de France from Bertrand Galbrun is composed entirely of the Grolleau grape. Monsieur Galbrun ferments this in bottle with seventeen grams per liter of sugar for the second fermentation and then bottles it without any *dosage*. The wine has a very pale salmon color and offers up a complex bouquet of tart melon, wild fennel, orange peel, a nice dollop of soil tones and a gentle topnote of ocean breeze. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and frothy, with good depth at the core, bright acids and just a whisper of natural wine wildness poking out on the long finish. This is very well done. 2019-2025. **87.**

Montlouis “la Methode Traditionnelle” Brut NV- Benoît et Julie Mérias

The Montlouis “la Methode Traditionnelle” non-vintage Brut from Benoît and Julie Mérias is a lovely bottle of sparkling chenin blanc, made from forty year-old vines. Benoît ages this wine three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of ten grams per liter (there is also a Brut Nature version). The wine offers up a fine and deep bouquet of quince, apple, chalky minerality, dried flowers and lemon peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, complex and very well-balanced, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, zesty finish. This is a very good chenin sparkler! 2019-2030+. **89.**

Les “D” En Bulles Vin de Table Brut Nature NV- Damien et Didier Richou (Anjou)

The brothers Richou produce their sparkling wine from a *cépages* of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent chenin blanc. The wine is aged for eighteen months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement and is made with no additions of sugar anywhere along the way. The current release offers up a complex bouquet of pear, quince, a touch of brioche, spring flowers and a complex base of minerality. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish, complex and shows fine backend mineral drive, with frothy *mousse*, fine cut and grip and a long, bone dry finish. To my palate, this is best suited to accompany a meal, as it is really quite dry on the backend, and though I admire its purity of purpose, I might have lobbied for just a bit of buffering *dosage* for aperitif usage! But, the wine is very well-made and seems like it could also age very well. 2019-2030+. **87.**



Montlouis Pétillant “Triple Zero”- Domaine de la Taille aux Loups (Jacky Blot)

The current release of Jacky Blot’s “Triple Zero” Montlouis Pétillant hails from the 2014 vintage, though there is no indication on the labels of this (that I can locate). The wine is made from forty year-old chenin blanc vines and harvested at twelve percent or more potential alcohol, so that there is no need for chaptalization or *dosage* after disgorgement. It is fermented entirely with indigenous yeasts in older casks, with the *vins clairs* not undergoing malo and then aged for two years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The 2014 version offers up a fine bouquet of apple, quince, a nice touch of warm bread, chalky soil tones, citrus peel and a dollop of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is bright, full and beautifully balanced, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, quite refined *mousse* and lovely focus and balance on the long and complex finish. This is one of the finest Loire Valley sparklers I have tasted in quite some time. 2019-2040+. **91.**

2016 Vouvray Pétillant- François Pinon

I drank the 2016 Vouvray Pétillant from François Pinon in a restaurant recently, so perhaps I did not catch the wine under ideal circumstances. It was a fairly large event and there were several bottles circling around, with a couple decidedly superior to others. Perhaps this was a reflection of the restaurant’s storage of the wine? In any case, here is a note from the best glass I drank that evening, with the wine offering up a refined nose of apple, honeycomb, chalky soil tones, sourdough bread and a bit of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and nicely balanced, with frothy *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long finish. Good juice, but given how well the 2014 (see below) was showing recently, we may have been unlucky with our bottles of the 2016. 2019-2030+. **89+?**

2014 Domaine Huët Vouvray Pétillant Brut (Vouvray)

The 2014 Domaine Huët Vouvray Pétillant is absolutely superb and offers up very good value in the world of sparkling wine prices. The bouquet is deep, pure and shows beautifully fruit tones of peach and quince to augment its fine base of chalky soil elements, spring flowers and an esthery topnote of bee pollen. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a very good base of soil, a lovely core of fruit, pinpoint bubbles and lovely balance and grip on the long and classy finish. Fine juice. 2019-2040+. **92.**

2014 Domaine François Pinon Vouvray Pétillant Brut (Vouvray)

I really like the 2014 Vouvray Pétillant from Domaine Pinon, which offers up lovely depth of fruit and complexity, coupled to outstanding backend mineral drive. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a blend of apple, quince, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones and just a touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full and nicely racy, with an excellent core, fine *mousse* and a long, classy and nicely mineral finish. This seems likely to drink very well early on, but I do not know how long it will keep in the cellar, as it is already very tasty. 2019-2040+? **91.**

2014 Le Rocher des Violettes Pétillant Originel- Xavier Weisskopf (Montlouis)

The 2014 Le Rocher des Violettes Pétillant Originel from Xavier Weisskopf is made from chenin blanc vines he has in the Touraine AOC, with the wine spending a minimum of two years aging *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and bottling, without any *dosage*, which is not allowed for the appellation of “Pétillant Originel”. The 2014 is superb, delivering a deep and complex bouquet of apple, quince, warm bread, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with excellent

focus and grip, lovely, frothy *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is terrific Loire Valley sparkling wine and an absolute steal! 2019-2030+. **90.**

2004 Chateau Tour Grise Saumur “Non-Dosé” Brut Nature

The 2004 Chateau Tour Grise Saumur “Non-Dosé” Brut Nature is really quite a fine bottle of sparkling wine and one of the best I have tasted from Saumur. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, quince, chalky dust, bread dough and a nice touch of stoniness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, vibrant and beautifully balanced, with impressive complexity, a good core, frothy *mousse* and very good length and grip on the focused finish. This is drinking very well indeed at age fifteen and still has plenty of life ahead of it. Fine juice. 2019-2030. **91.**

Crémant de Bourgogne, Crémant d’Alsace and German Sekt

Crémant d’Alsace Extra Brut NV- Domaine Mittnacht Frères

The Crémant d’Alsace Extra Brut from Domaine Mittnacht Frères is composed of an intriguing blend of sixty percent pinot auxerrois and ten percent each of pinot blanc, pinot gris, riesling and pinot noir. It is aged for eighteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex mix of apple, a touch of wheat bread, lovely soil tones, a wisp of sweet nuttiness (from the pinot gris?) and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and nicely balanced, with a solid core, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the bouncy finish. Good juice. 2019-2025+. **88.**

Crémant de Bourgogne “Cuvée Blanche” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV- Bruno Danguin

As I have mentioned in the past, Bruno Danguin’s vineyards lie a kilometer or two outside of the Côte de Bars limits in Champagne, so these wine are, for all intents and purposes, really examples of Aube Champagne, with the same base of Kimmeridgian limestone. He farms all of his vines organically and is a first class winemaker as well. His current release of Cuvée Blanche is a lovely wine, hailing from the base year of 2015 and offering up a complex bouquet of white peach, pear, warm bread, chalky soil tones and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, frothy *mousse* and a long, classy finish that closes with fine mineral drive and grip. This is a stellar value! 2018-2030. **90.**

Crémant de Bourgogne “le Grand Classique” Brut NV- Bruno Danguin

The “le Grand Classique” bottling from Bruno Danguin is his *négociant* bottling, as he buys the grapes for this cuvée from some of his neighbors whose viticulture he respects. Consequently, the wine is not made entirely from organically-farmed vineyards, as are Monsieur Danguin’s estate bottled wines, but the farming is good and the quality of the grapes is very respectable. Monsieur Danguin makes a very good wine from this production, with the new release offering up a complex bouquet of apple, bread dough, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is another bargain from Monsieur Danguin! 2019-2030. **88.**

2016 Crémant “Préstige de Constance” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut- Bruno Danguin

The “Préstige de Constance” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut from Bruno Danguin is composed entirely of pinot noir. The 2016 version is a super wine, delivering a superb aromatic constellation of peach, apple, brioche, chalky soil tones and a nice touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and full-bodied, with an excellent core of fruit,

fine limestone mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and plenty of cut and grip on the long and complex finish. This is first class Crémant de Bourgogne! 2018-2030. **91.**

2016 Crémant d'Alsace Extra Brut- Domaine Albert Mann

This is the first example of sparkling wine that I have ever tasted from the Barthelmé brothers at Domaine Albert Mann and it is a really lovely wine. The wine is composed of a unique *cépages* of pinot auxerrois, pinot blanc and pinot noir. The 2016 version offers up a beautifully expressive bouquet of apple, white peach, lovely soil tones, a touch of bread dough, spring flowers and just a whisper of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with a strong vein of soil, frothy *mousse* and a long, bone-dry, complex and quite well-balanced finish. The bubbles here are just a touch coarse, but other than that very minor complaint, this is a first class sparkling wine. 2019-2030+. **88.**

2016 Fleur d'Aligoté Crémant- Céline et Laurent Tripoz (Mâcon)

The 2016 Fleur d'Aligoté Crémant from Céline et Laurent Tripoz is a lovely sparkling wine. It is made with zero *dosage* or added SO₂, so it is probably best drunk in its relative youth. The wine offers up a superb nose of apple, toasty notes, a lovey undertow of minerality and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with zesty acids, fine focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a long, vibrant finish. There is just a whisper of volatile acidity hovering here in the background, so I would opt for drinking the wine over the next few years, as the no SO₂ regimen would dissuade me from trusting this wine too long in the cellar. But, for drinking over the next few years, this is very tasty. 2019-2023. **88.**

2015 Crémant de Bourgogne “Confrérie” Brut Rosé- Bruno Dangin

The 2015 Crémant de Bourgogne “Confrérie” Brut Rosé from Bruno Dangin was disgorged in March of 2018 and is quite a deep salmon color. The wine delivers superb aromatic complexity in its mix of cherries, rhubarb, chalky soil tones, smoke and a nice touch of rye toast. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven in personality, with refined *mousse*, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the gently vinous finish. This is first class Rosé. **2018-2028. 91.**

2015 Crémant d'Alsace Blanc de Blancs Brut NV- Domaine Pfister

Mélanie Pfister's Crémant d'Alsace is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot blanc and pinot auxerrois. It hails entirely from the 2015 vintage, but this is only shared on the back label, and was aged for thirty-two months on its fine lees prior to disgorgement. The wine is bright and zesty aromatically, offering up scents of apple, white peach, a touch of menthol, lovely minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and very refined, with good intensity of flavor, frothy *mousse* and fine mineral signature on the long and vibrant finish. This has a lovely lightness of step and plenty of personality. 2019-2030. **90.**

2014 Crémant de Bourgogne “Carte d'Or” Brut- Domaine Brigand

Domaine Brigand was a new producer to me, but this small estate is located just outside of the Aube as well. Their 2014 Carte d'Or bottling is very good, offering up a nicely youthful bouquet of apple, fresh-baked bread, a touch of walnut, chalky soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, good mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and impressive length and grip on the complex and very nicely balanced finish.

This has a very good girdle of acidity and will age quite well, but is drinking nicely today. 2019-2030+. **88.**

2013 Spätburgunder Sparkling Brut Rosé- Peter Jakob Kühn (Rüdesheim)

The 2013 Spätburgunder Sparkling Rosé from Peter Jakob Kühn is one of the palest Rosés one will ever come across, as there is barely a blush to the color and it is bottled in a clear bottle, to emphasize its delicacy of color. The wine is quite good on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of apple, bread dough, lovely minerality and a touch of lemongrass in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and very nicely balanced, with good complexity, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a long, frothy and quite pleasing finish. Checking on the estate's website, I see a bottle of Brut Rosé that is decidedly darker in color than this sample; is the 2013 vintage particularly light on hue or was something mislabeled? In any case, this particular bottle is really quite good, though not with much Rosé characteristics. 2019-2030. **88.**

2012 Crémant d'Alsace Blanc de Blancs Brut NV- Domaine Pfister

This bottling of André and Mélanie Pfister's Crémant d'Alsace is from the vintage of 2012, but again, this is only printed on the back label of the wine. The *cépages* is a bit different than the 2015 version, with the 2012 a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot blanc; it spent forty-three years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. The wine offers up a deep and complex bouquet of white peach, raw almond, chalky soil tones, brioche and a gently musky topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is bright, full and focused, with a good core, frothy *mousse*, zesty acids and fine length and grip on the complex and nicely balanced finish. This is good juice, but I like the overall balance of the 2015 just a hair better. 2019-2030. **89.**

2012 Riesling Sekt Brut- Peter Jakob Kühn (Rüdesheim)

The 2012 Riesling Sekt Brut from Peter Jakob Kühn has a lovely bouquet, with all of the expressiveness one expects from Riesling, as it wafts from the glass in a complex mix of apple, a touch of pineapple, menthol, lovely, salty minerality, dried flowers and a hint of botanicals in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and vibrant, with lovely transparency, bright acids, frothy *mousse* and impressive depth and grip on the long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is more complex and expressive on both the nose and palate than the 2013 Spätburgunder Rosé Brut, but the finish is not quite as clean as the above wine, so they offer different positive elements. Both are well-made, and if the backend precision of the former were on display here, this wine would merit three more points! That said, it is still quite tasty and impressively deep and serious Sekt. 2019-2030+. **88.**

2012 Crémant de Bourgogne "Préstige" Brut Nature- Céline et Laurent Tripoz (magnum)

The 2012 Crémant de Bourgogne "Préstige" from Céline et Laurent Tripoz is all chardonnay and it is excellent wine. The bouquet is bright and complex, wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, fresh-baked bread, chalky soil tones, and a touch of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite nicely balanced, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is very, very good Crémant. 2018-2025. **90.**



American and Italian Sparkling Wines

Piper-Sonoma Brut NV (Sonoma)

The current release of Piper-Sonoma non-vintage Brut is composed of a blend of sixty percent chardonnay, fifteen percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent pinot meunier. The wine spends eighteen months aging *sur latte* and includes around twenty percent reserve wines each year. The wine offers up a bright and impressively complex nose of apple, pear, warm biscuits, dried flowers and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and has been pretty generously fed its *dosage*, as there is a bit of overt backend sweetness poking out on the fairly long finish. The bubbles here are not particularly refined, but it is the *dosage* that detracts from the backend precision and keeps the score down a bit. The bouquet is really quite good. 2019-2025. **85.**

Piper-Sonoma Brut Rosé NV (Sonoma)

The Piper-Sonoma Brut Rosé non-vintage bottling is a completely different *cépages* from the regular Brut NV, as this wine is made from a blend of fifty-four percent chardonnay, thirty-nine percent pinot noir and seven percent pinot meunier. The wine is not aged anywhere near as long on its fine lees as the non-vintage Brut, as it only sees a minimum of eleven months *sur latte*. The current release delivers a nose of melon, fresh apricot, a hint of rhubarb, salty soil tones and a bit of orange peel. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and better balanced to my palate than the Brut NV, with a more precise backend from better integrated *dosage*, good acids and grip and a long, fairly complex finish. This is quite good. 2019-2025. **88.**

2013 Franciacorta “Saten”- Monzio Compagnoni

The 2013 Franciacorta “Saten” from Monzio Compagnoni is a very nice bottle of Blanc de Blancs and a very good value. The quite complex bouquet offers up scents of apple, a touch of orange, salty minerality and a topnote of green olive. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite complex, with a good core, pinpoint bubbles and good bounce and grip on the long finish. I do not have the exact *dosage* numbers on this wine, but it seems perhaps just a touch generous and a slightly lower *dosage* might give the wine even a bit more backend precision. But, that said, this is a very well-made wine and offers plenty of quality for its price! 2019-2025. **88.**

Champagne

Non-Dosé and Brut Nature NV

Laherte Frères Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV (Chavot)

Aurélien Laherte’s current release of Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut Nature hails from the superb base year of 2015, with half of the blend made up of reserve wines from the previous two years. As is customary for him, he ages his *vins clairs* for fully six months in barrel prior to blending and bottling for aging on their fine lees. The new Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature is lovely, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, a touch of almond, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with good acids, elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. Aurélien Laherte picks his grapes at greater ripeness level for this bottling, which gives excellent depth of fruit to buffer the acids in this non-*dosé* wine. 2019-2040+. **91+.**

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

Vincent Laval’s current release of his Cumières Brut Nature is from the base year of 2016. His US importers asked Vincent if they could let their allocation age an additional six months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, so the American bottling spent a little bit longer on its fine lees than those in other markets. The *cépages* in 2016 has a touch more chardonnay than usual in the blend, so the percentages this year are forty-two percent chardonnay and just under thirty percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The wine is showing beautifully today, wafting from the glass in a superb mix of apple, passion fruit, a complex base of soil, brioche, dried flowers and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and youthfully structured, with a rock solid core of fruit, great focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, precise and racy finish. This is still young days for this wine, but all of the constituent components are in place for greatness down the road. 2023-2060. **93.**

Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 15” Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet is now bottling many of his cuvées without any added SO₂ and I worry a little about this, as his wines are so brilliantly crafted for long-term cellaring and I hope no potential longevity will end up being sacrificed because of this practice. Only time will tell. In any case, his Shaman 15 non-vintage Brut Nature bottling is outstanding, being composed of its customary blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay. It was disgorged in March of 2019 and offers up a superb bouquet of white peach, apple, brioche, a complex base of soil, dried flowers and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, refined *mousse* and lovely acid bounce adding precision and lift on the long, classy finish. This is outstanding wine. 2019-2045+. **92+.**

Moutardier “Pure Meunier” Brut Nature NV (Le Breuil)

The new release of Moutardier’s “Pure Meunier” non-vintage Brut Nature is from the base year of 2012 and spent nearly six years aging *sur latte* prior to release. The wine is still fairly youthful on the palate, with a bit of piercing acidity, but the nose and flavor profile show lovely potential for a few more years down the road. The bouquet offers up a refined constellation of white peach, loads of meunier floral tones, bread dough and a good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and racy, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and good length and grip on the focused and still fairly brisk finish. Brut Nature purists will not doubt enjoy this wine already, but to my palate, it still needs a bit more bottle age to allow the acids to soften up a tad more. 2021-2045+. **90+**.

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

The new release of Jean-Marc Sélèque Solessence Brut Nature is a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir and hails from the base year of 2013. However, fully fifty percent of the cuvée is composed from the domaine’s perpetual solera of reserve wines. It was disgorged in July of 2018. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of white peach, a touch of passion fruit, blood orange, chalky soil tones, brioche and a gorgeous, musky floral topnote from the meunier in the blend. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very, very long on the backend, with an excellent core, refined *mousse*, and impressive mineral drive on the finish. This is one of the best young bottles of Brut Nature I have tasted in many a year! 2019-2050. **93**.

Blanc de Blancs Brut and Extra Brut NV

Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” Extra Brut NV (Avize)

The Le Brun Servenay “Mélodie en C” non-vintage Extra Brut is composed entirely of chardonnay, though it is not labeled as a blanc de blancs on the label. The new release is from the base year of 2015 and was disgorged in November of 2018 with a finishing *dosage* of three grams per liter. The *vins clairs* for this bottling do not go through malo. The wine delivers a complex and quite classy bouquet of pear, apple, chalky minerality, brioche, a touch of hazelnut and a lovely panoply of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and zesty finish. This really is a strong release of this fine bottling! 2019-2040+. **91+**.

Demièrre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Oger)

I do not know the date of disgorgement for this bottle of Demièrre-Ansiot Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut, but it has been in my cellar since the late spring of 2013, so probably this was disgorged early that year? The wine has aged beautifully and is now really drinking at its peak, offering up a fine bouquet of apple, pear, toasted almond, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and still retains lovely acidity and *mousse*, with a good core and impressive focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a fine moment to be drinking this wine. 2019-2029. **91**.

Champagne Doyard “Cuvée Vendémiaire” Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus)

There is no information on the back label about the base year or date of disgorgement for this wine, so I am uncertain how long it has been in the market. In any case, the wine is quite good and drinking very nicely today, offering up scents of pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, a hint of buttery oak, *crème patissière* and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and shows off fine mid-palate depth, with frothy *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, poised and very nicely balanced finish. Good juice which was finished with a *dosage*

of four grams per liter, but has been aged long enough on its fine lees prior to disgorgement for the structure to have softened enough for the wine to drink with precision and lovely balance between the acids, minerality and generous fruit tones. A very, very fine bottle of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. 2019-2045. **91+**.

Champagne Gallois Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Vertus)

Serge Gallois is a new producer to me in Vertus, but I was very much impressed by his non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. The wine is aged three years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and the new release offers up a lovely bouquet of pear, golden delicious apple, a touch of almond paste, chalky minerality and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with good depth at the core, frothy *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the classy and still fairly youthful finish. I do not have precise information on the *dosage* here, but it is judiciously done (maybe six to seven grams?) and allows the wine to have a nice touch of buffering fruit perception to go with those good, racy young chardonnay acids. Good juice. 2019-2040+. **91+**.

Grongnet Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Étoges)

Madame Grongnet has tweaked her cellar regimen just a touch with the release of her 2014 base year bottling of her excellent non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. In the past, a small percentage of the *vins clairs* for this bottling underwent malolactic fermentation, but starting with this release, none of the *vins clairs* will go through malo any longer. This bottling was disgorged in September of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter, though it seems to carry less than this, due to the lovely, racy girdle of acidity in the wine. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very classy mix of pear, apple, brioche, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely mid-palate depth, with fine mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, very well-balanced and complex finish. This is first class Blanc de Blancs and an outstanding value! If you are not yet familiar with Madame Grongnet's excellent wines, this is the perfect introduction! 2019-2045. **92.**

Henriot Blanc de Blancs Brut NV (Reims)

The non-vintage Blanc de Blancs has always been one of the strong suits at Henriot, and the new release is no exception. The bouquet is pure, vibrant and classy, offering up scents of pear, apple, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of *crème patissière* and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and still youthfully zippy, with a fine core, good focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, zesty finish. As is often the case with this cuvée, a year or two in the cellar will really allow it to blossom on the palate. 2021-2040. **91.**

Lancelot-Pienne Blanc de Blancs "Table Ronde" Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Cramant)

Lancelot-Pienne is a completely new estate to me, but when the importer also carries Jacquesson and Jean-Marque Sélèque in their portfolio, you have pretty high expectations! Gilles Lancelot is the current winegrower and proprietor at the estate, having taken over from his father in 2005. His Extra Brut bottling of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs hails entirely from their grand cru vineyards in the villages of Cramant, Avize and Chouilly. The wine is from the base year of 2014, with twenty percent reserve wines from the domaine's perpetual solera. It was finished with a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter. The wine offers up an excellent bouquet of delicious apple, pear, almond, limestone minerality, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, minerally and full-bodied, with a rock solid core of fruit, refined *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, very well-balanced and still fairly youthful finish. This has the structural chassis to really age beautifully! 2019-2045+. **92.**

Lancelot-Pienne Blanc de Blancs “Instant Présent” Brut NV (Cramant)

The new release of “Instant Présent” non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Lancelot-Pienne is from the base year of 2015, with twenty percent of the blend consisting of reserve wines from their solera. The wine includes some production from vineyards around Épernay which are not ranked grand cru, though most of the cuvée is from the family’s vines in their grand cru holdings in the Côte de Blancs. I do not have the exact details on *dosage* for this cuvée, but I would guess around six grams, as it is certainly not overly *dosé*. The bouquet is lovely, with the contribution of the vineyards from just south of Épernay giving the wine a quite different chalkiness to its soil component (far less overtly mineral than the Table Ronde), to play off lovely notes of pear, a lovely touch of almond, brioche, spring flowers and plenty of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and more open in personality out of the blocks than the Extra Brut, with a good core, fine soil signature, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. This is very good as well! 2019-2040+. **91.**

Larmandier-Bernier “Latitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus)

The new bottling in the market of Larmandier-Bernier’s Latitude is from the base year of 2015, with forty percent of the blend from the previous vintage. The wine was disgorged in December of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. Today the wine offers up a lovely nose of pear, apple, almond pastry cream, chalky soil tones and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is brisk, full-bodied, focused and starting to just show some secondary layers of complexity on the palate, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. This is quite drinkable today, but another couple of years more of bottle age would allow the structure to relax quite a bit more. Good juice. 2019-2040+. **90+.**

Larmandier-Bernier “Longitude” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Vertus)

Longitude is Larmandier-Bernier’s premier cru bottling of Blanc de Blancs and hails from fruit grown in Vertus, Avize, Cramant and Oger. The current release is from the base year of 2014 and was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and offers up a superb nose of apple, pear, hazelnut, brioche, chalky soil tones and a topnote of almond blossoms. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely resolved and open today, with an excellent core of fruit, bright acids, pinpoint bubbles and very good length and grip on the complex finish. This is very good juice. 2019-2040. **92.**

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

The current release of Lilbert-Fils non-vintage Blanc de Blancs Brut is composed of two-thirds base year 2014 and one-third reserve wines. It spent four and a half years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in the summer of 2018; it was finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The wine delivers a lovely aromatic constellation of pear, delicious apple, chalky minerality, a hint of almond pastry cream and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and focused, with pinpoint bubbles, good mineral undertow, vibrant acids and good length and grip on the complex and still fairly youthful finish. This is very easy to drink today, but it is still a young wine and will be even better with a few years in the cellar to allow it to come out more fully from behind its structural elements. 2019-2040. **91.**

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

Just prior to wrapping up this article, the new release of non-vintage Blanc de Blancs from Lilbert-Fils arrived in the US, with this wine hailing from the base year of 2015. It will take a few weeks to find its way into the pipeline and the base year of 2014 should be the wine on merchants shelves for at least a few more months, but here is a note on the 2015 base year, which will soon be the primary wine available. It is a fifty-fifty blend of 2015 juice and reserve wines,

was disgorged in January of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. As I have mentioned in the past, 2015 is a very, very strong year in Champagne and the Lilbert-Fils non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is showing beautifully out of the blocks, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, almond, apple, chalky minerality, a hint of brioche, *crème patissière* and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and brisk, with an excellent core of fruit, fine mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. It is interesting to make comparisons with the 2014 base year, as this may have a bit more mid-palate depth to it than the previous incarnation, but it does not have the additional year of bottle age, so it is more tightly-knit right now. This deserves a bit of time to relax structurally, but this has fine constituent components and is really going to age gracefully and is a fine candidate for the cellar. 2020-2050. 91+.



Champagne Henriot in Reims- this looks very similar to the old Krug facilities which are around the corner.

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

Readers may recall that the “Perle” is Lilbert-Fils’ old vine bottling, made from their oldest parcels in Cramant. It is bottled with five grams of *dosage* and at a slightly lower pressure than their regular Blanc de Blancs. This bottle is from the same base year of 2013 as the example I reviewed last August, but with a later disgorgement, as this was taken off its fine lees in the summer of 2018, where the previous bottle had been disgorged in fall of 2017. The new disgorgement is really refined, with a beautiful and very precise bouquet of pear, lemon, apple,

fresh almond, brioche, chalky minerality and a gently floral topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, elegant and very long, with lovely, frothy *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, understated and complex finish. This is really, really good. 2019-2040+. **92+**.

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

This is the newest release of the Perle from Lilbert-Fils, which hails from the base year mix of forty-five percent each of 2014 and 2015, with ten percent reserve wines used in the blend. It was disgorged in fall of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of five grams per liter. The early returns are that this is going to be one of the best example of Perle in recent memory, as the wine is already beautifully expressive on the nose, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of golden delicious apple, pear, almond custard, limestone minerality, a touch of brioche and incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still fairly primary in personality, with lovely depth at the core, very, very elegant, frothy *mousse*, lovely focus and grip and a long, promising and very classy finish. As is the case with the two version of the regular Blanc de Blancs, one has to extrapolate a bit, as this has a full year less of bottle age, but my gut instinct is that this is going to be very special and a hair better than the very, very good previous release of Perle. 2020-2050. **92+**.

Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs “Grand Cru” Extra Brut NV (Mesnil sur Oger)

The Pierre Moncuit Extra Brut non-vintage Blanc de Blancs is the same wine as the Brut bottling, hailing from the base year of 2015, but it receives a *dosage* of 3.5 grams per liter, instead of the seven of the Brut. It was disgorged a couple of months earlier in July of 2018. The wine is lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of delicious apple, pear, almond, bread dough, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a hint of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and focused, with a lovely core, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the bright and well-balanced finish. This has relaxed a bit more than the Brut NV, due to being five more months out from its disgorgement, and is really drinking quite nicely today. However, it is still very early days and this wine will be even better after a few years in the cellar. 2019-2045. **91+**.

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

The current release of Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Brut hails entirely from the harvest of 2015 and was disgorged in November of 2018, with a finishing *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine offers up a fine and youthful bouquet of tart pear, bread dough, lemon zest, limestone minerality, a touch of almond and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, brisk and focused, with an excellent core of ripe fruit, a youthful girdle of acidity, frothy *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the nascently complex finish. In my experience, this cuvée has an excellent track record for aging and I would opt to tuck the new release away for three or four years and really let it blossom, though it is quite easy to drink right now. 2022-2045. **91+**.

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV (Pierry)

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s most recent rendition of his “Quintette” Blanc de Blancs non-vintage Extra Brut is the first wine I have tasted from him that originates from the superb 2015 vintage. He uses parcels of chardonnay from the villages of Vertus, Épernay, Pierry, Dizy and Mardeuil to produce this wine, so he gets a lovely blend of soil complexity to serve as a foundation for the superb chardonnay fruit. The bottling includes twenty percent reserve wines which he keeps in barrel and it was disgorged in July of 2018 with a finishing *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine could do with a couple more years in the cellar to fully blossom, but it

shows superb potential in its aromatic constellation of pear, golden delicious apples, fresh almond, chalky soil tones and a touch of pastry cream in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, vibrant and rock solid at the core, with great backend mineral drive, excellent focus and grip, lovely *mousse* and a long, very classy and promising finish. This is first class juice- just give it a couple more years in the cellar to fully blossom! 2021-2055. **92+**.

Champagne Suenen “Oiry” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Cramant)

The new release of Aurélien Suenen’s Oiry grand cru bottling is from the base year of 2015, and as was the case with the 2014 base year it was eventually finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. It was disgorged in June of 2018. The wine is still very young and truly deserves at least a few years in the cellar to really start to offer up its full palette of aromatic and flavor complexity. The bouquet is still primary, but also precise and expressive, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, golden delicious apple, brioche, almond, a very complex base of limestone minerality and a nice touch of incipient smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely wrapped up in a girdle of racy acidity, with a rock solid core, excellent focus and grip and a very long, very pure and very, very promising finish. This is certainly approachable today, but try to bury it in the cellar for at least another four or five years and really let the magic unfold! 2023-2060. **93**.

Champagne Suenen “C + C” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut NV (Cramant)

As I mentioned last year, grand cru blend from Aurélien Suenen has been given the cuvée name of “C + C”, as it is a blend of fruit from the two villages of Cramant and Chouilly, and the authorities do not allow the names of two different grand cru villages to appear on the same label. The 2013 base year was the first to wear this new label, and this note is on the 2015 base year, which is just hitting these shores. The wine was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter and disgorged in June of 2018. It offers up a more youthfully reticent bouquet than the lovely Oiry bottling, but also more depth and potential longevity. The nose is a very primary blend of apple, pear, almond, chalky soil tones, a touch of warm bread, gentle smokiness and a lovely, floral topnote redolent of white lilies. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and absolutely rock solid at the core, with elegant *mousse*, laser-like focus, impeccable balance and grip and a very, very long, minerally and oh, so promising finish. This is going to be stellar, but is a bit more emphatic than the Oiry in demanding some time alone in the cellar. 2025-2065. **93+**.

Vouette et Sorbée “Blanc de Argile” Extra Brut NV

This bottle of Vouette et Sorbée “Blanc de Argile” is from the base year of 2008 and was disgorged in May of 2010. The wine is nicely mature today, offering up a complex nose of apple, toasted almond, chalky minerality, brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and fairly complex, with a good core, fine soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a good, solid non-vintage bottling at its peak, but it is not overly complex and its relative simplicity is what keeps its score down a tad. 2019-2030. **89**.

Brut and Extra Brut NV

Agrapart “Les 7 Crus” Extra Brut NV (Avize)

The current release of Agrapart’s “Les 7 Crus” non-vintage Extra Brut was disgorged in January of 2018. The *cépages* is ninety percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The wine is quite pretty, but still a bit youthful and undeveloped in its aromatic combination of apple, pear, bread dough, chalky soil

tones and a bit of gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and nicely balanced, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the focused and zesty finish. This release seems just a touch less complex than the last example that I drank, but it may just need a bit of bottle age. 2019-2045. **90+**.

Champagne Barnaut “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Bouzy)

The current release widely available in the market of Philippe Secondé’s Champagne Barnaut “Grande Réserve” non-vintage Brut was disgorged in June of 2018 and is composed of its customary blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay. It was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter and hails from the base year of 2014, though with its customary portion of reserve wine from the solera started by the original Monsieur Barnaut all the way back in the nineteenth century and refreshed every year since that time. The wine is excellent on the nose, wafting from the glass in a refined blend of apple, white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, gentle floral tones and a whiff of fresh-baked bread in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and a long, classy and quite open finish. This has the generosity of Bouzy, while still staying impressively light on its feet and vivacious in personality. It is a first class non-vintage Brut. 2019-2045+. **91**.

Champagne Barnaut “Quintessence du Pinot Noir” Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Bouzy)

The current release of Philippe Secondé’s “Quintessence du Pinot Noir” non-vintage Brut was finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. It was disgorged in December of 2017. The wine is excellent on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet revealing scents of apple, white peach, fresh-baked bread, lovely soil tones, a hint of caraway seed and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core, good soil signature, elegant *mousse* and a long, vibrant and classy finish. This is really lovely at the table. 2019-2035. **91**.

Champagne Barnaut Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Bouzy) Released in 2014 (Bouzy)

This particular bottle of Philippe Secondé’s non-vintage Blanc de Noirs Brut is the same cuvée as the above, though it did not include the Quintessence du Pinot Noir sobriquet on the label back in this era. The bottle had been in a friend’s cellar for five years since release and was drinking very well with the additional bottle age, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full and very elegant in profile with the additional cellaring, with a lovely core, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and wide open finish that closes with lovely bounce and grip. This is now fully into its apogee and is drinking with style and grace. 2019-2040. **91**.

Herbert Beaufort “les Facettes” 1er Cru” Brut Réserve NV (Bouzy)

The current bottling in the market of Herbert Beaufort “les Facettes” non-vintage Brut Réserve was disgorged in June of 2018. The *cépages* of this cuvée is seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay, with the *vins clairs* fermented and raised in stainless steel (without going through malo). I do not have exact *dosage* levels, but it is close to Extra Brut for certain. The wine offers up a bright bouquet of apple, bread dough, lovely, chalky minerality, dried flowers and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and still youthfully structured, with a good core and fine mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, promising finish. This is easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and will repay at least a few years in the cellar. 2019-2035+. **91**.

Herbert Beaufort Blanc de Noirs “Grand Cru” Brut NV (Bouzy)

The new release of Herbert Beaufort Blanc de Noirs “Grand Cru” non-vintage Brut is composed entirely of pinot noir and is from the base year of 2015. It was disgorged in June of 2018, and like all of the Beaufort family’s wines, the *vins clairs* do not undergo malolactic fermentation. The bouquet here is beautiful, jumping from the glass in a vibrant blend of white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, white flowers and a delicate touch of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and brisk, with an excellent core, lovely mineral drive, elegant *mousse* and a long, crisp and well-balanced finish. This has a beautiful level of low *dosage*, which buffers the non-malo acidity very nicely, without stealing any of the wine’s impressive backend precision. 2019-2040. **92.**

Bernard Brémont Brut NV (Ambonnay)

The Brémont family make very, very good Champagne from their small domaine in Ambonnay, but I would really be delighted if they would start putting the date of disgorgement on their back labels, just to give some idea of what base year one is drinking. This was the autumn of 2018 release, drunk in November of last year. The wine is a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay and offers up a fine, youthful nose of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, bread dough and a nice touch of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely mineral in personality, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and very good length and grip on its focused and well-balanced finish. I am guessing this is a relatively recent disgorgement, as it is seeming just a whisper sweeter than the last couple of releases that I have drunk, but I have a hard time imagining that the Brémont family would have increased the *dosage*, so I just think this is still recovering from its disgorgement. It is a very good bottle and a fine value. 2019-2040. **91+.**

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

The new release of Cuvée Tradition from the fine Ambonnay house of R. H. Coutier is composed of its traditional blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. The wine is from the base year of 2013, with forty percent of the cuvée made up of reserve wines. The bottling was disgorged in June of 2018 and finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. It delivers a fine, classy bouquet of apple, white peach, a complex base of soil tones, brioche, incipient smokiness and a topnote of fruit blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with bright acids, superb focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles, excellent mineral drive and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. This is really a terrific bottle of non-vintage Brut from a house that deserves to be much better known! 2019-2040+. **92.**

Jérôme Dehours “Trio S” Brut NV (Mareuil le Port)

The current release of Jérôme Dehours “Trio S” non-vintage Brut is composed entirely of pinot meunier, made from a solera that Jérôme started in 1998, only two years after buying back the family domaine. The wine is finished with a moderate *dosage* of seven grams per liter and the bouquet offers up a beautifully floral blend of white peach, apple, musky floral tones, brioche, chalky soil and a touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and very well-balanced finish. Despite this hailing from a more than twenty year-old solera system, the wine is quite youthful today and will be even better with further bottle age. 2019-2040. **92.**

Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” Brut NV (Damery)

It had been ten months since I last tasted the most recent bottling of Alexandre Filaine “Cuvée Spéciale” non-vintage Brut, which hails from the base year of 2015. Not much has changed since then, as the wine remains as breathtakingly beautiful as ever and is still in its infancy and deserves four or five more years in the cellar before drinking. The wine is a blend of forty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot meunier and the wine was disgorged in May of last year with a finishing *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is remarkably expressive aromatically for such a young wine, offering up scents of pear, apple, a touch of acacia blossom, almond, *crème patissière*, complex, chalky soil tones and a touch of orange blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and positively piquant with a great girdle of acidity, great focus and balance, lovely depth at the core, refined *mousse* and a very, very long, vibrant and precise finish. This is breathtakingly beautiful wine by any measure, but unheard of for its quality level as a “basic” non-vintage Brut. Fabrice Gass has made some great, great wines during his long career, but this is clearly one of his high-water marks! 2023-2055+. **95.**

Gatinois “Brut Tradition” NV (Aÿ)

The new releases of non-vintage bottlings from the lovely small house of Gatinois have been outfitted with chic new labels and I hope these help these fine wines find an even wider audience. The Brut Tradition is its customary *cépages* of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with the wine from the base year of 2015 and including thirty percent reserves. It was disgorged in June of 2018 and finished off with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in ripe, classic Aÿ mix of apple, peach, *patissière*, a lovely base of soil, orange blossoms and a hint of the nuttiness to come with a bit more bottle age. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely broad shouldered in the Aÿ tradition, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil signature, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is lovely and drinking beautifully already. 2019-2040. **91.**

Alfred Gratien Brut NV (Épernay)

Alfred Gratien non-vintage Brut is always one of the best values to be found amongst the *Grandes Marques* examples. The current release was disgorged in October of 2018. The wine offers up a lovely and quite complex bouquet of apple, white peach, *patissière*, chalky soil tones, spring flowers and a touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and well-balanced, with fine depth at the core, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the focused and quite vibrant finish. This is quite fine. 2019-2040+. **91.**

Henriot “Brut Souverain” NV (Reims)

The new bottling in the market of Henriot “Brut Souverain” is composed of a blend of fifty percent chardonnay, forty-five percent pinot noir and five percent pinot meunier. It spent three years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of less than eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a vibrant and precise bouquet of apple, pear, plenty of smokiness, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and fairly youthful in structure, with bright acids, lovely focus and grip, a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, nascently complex finish. This non-vintage cuvée has a fine record of aging in my cellar and I would not hesitate to tuck this away for a few years and really let it blossom completely. 2019-2040+. **91.**

Henriot “Cuve 38” Brut NV (Reims)

This is the third iteration of Henriot’s brilliant Cuve 38 bottling. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. It offers up a beautifully complex nose of lemon, apple, warm biscuits, chalky minerality, white flowers and a nice touch of orange zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a rock solid core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, excellent focus and complexity and a very, very long, still quite youthful finish. As this is Henriot’s brilliant solera bottling, it already has a lovely touch of secondary layers of complexity on the nose, but it is a young thoroughbred on the palate and will want some extended cellaring to really reach its magical summit of development. Brilliant juice. 2019-2050. **95.**

Jacquesson “Cuvée No. 741” Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

The release of Jacquesson “Cuvée No. 741” hails entirely from the base year of 2013, with all of the *vins clairs* for this bottling fermented and raised in older oak *foudres* prior to blending and bottling. It was disgorged in January of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter and includes twenty percent reserve wines in the blend this year. It is composed of a *cépages* of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier, but the folks at Jacquesson prefer these days not to give the exact percentages of each variety in the blend. In any event, the wine is outstanding and one of the most forward and tasty examples of this bottling that I have tasted right out of the blocks. The bouquet delivers an excellent blend of apple, white peach, chalky minerality, a touch of nutskin, warm biscuits and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a lovey core, refined *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex and already quite wide open finish. This is a lovely iteration of the 700 Series. 2019-2050+. **92.**

Jacquesson “Cuvée No. 742” Extra Brut NV (Dizy)

The newest release of Jacquesson’s flagship bottling is their “Cuvée No. 742”, which finds its foundation in the base year of 2014. The *vins clairs* were once again fermented and aged in large, older oak *foudres* and the wine was finished with a *dosage* of 1.5 grams per liter when it was disgorged in July of 2018. The wine offers up a fine nose of pear, fresh almond, a bit of apple blossom, chalky minerality, brioche and just a whisper of buttery oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with brisk acids, excellent focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and lovely focus and balance on the long and still fairly youthful finish. This is quite dry, but has plenty of depth of fruit to buffer its acids and is quite approachable today, but it is still in climbing mode and will be a far more complete glass of bubbly five years down the road. For current drinking, the Cuvée No. 741 is the more ready to go bottling. Fine juice in the making. 2021-2055+. **92.**

Janisson-Baradon et Fils “Sélection” Brut NV (Épernay)

The new release of Janisson-Baradon “Sélection” non-vintage Brut is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. It spends twenty-four months aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement and finishing *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, *patissière*, a nice base of soil and a topnote of spring flowers. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, refined *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is not overly complex, but all of the pieces are in place and it is a lovely bottle of *aperitif*-styled bubbly. 2019-2035. **89.**

Janisson-Baradon et Fils “Grande Réserve” Brut NV (Épernay)

The Janisson-Baradon et Fils “Grande Réserve” non-vintage Brut is also composed of equal parts of chardonnay and pinot noir. I do not have a date of disgorgement for the current

release, but it was aged at least five years *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. The wine offers up a lovely aromatic constellation of white peach, apple, fresh-baked bread, a fine base of soil, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and focused, with an excellent core of fruit, elegant *mousse*, zesty acids and fine balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a step up in gravitas from the Brut Sélection. 2019-2045. **92.**

Krug Grande Cuvée “167^{ème} Édition” Brut NV (Reims)

The new release of Krug Grande Cuvée “167^{ème} Édition” is stellar. The wine is from the base year of 2011 and utterly transcends that vintage, but, of course, it includes nearly two hundred different wines in the blend, with the oldest reserves dating all the way back to the 1995 vintage. Fully forty-two percent of the cuvée this year is made up of reserve wines. The *cépages* for the 167^{ème} Édition is forty-seven percent pinot noir, thirty-six percent chardonnay and seventeen percent pinot meunier. The wine shows its lovely preponderance of pinot noir on the nose, wafting from the glass in a beautifully complex blend of apple, white peach, a touch of *patissière*, very complex soil tones, caraway seed and a gently floral contribution in the upper register from the pinot meunier in the blend. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and nicely broad-shouldered, with great depth at the core, refined *mousse*, bright, seamless acids and outstanding focus and grip on the very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is simply outstanding and should age effortlessly for fifty to seventy-five years! 2019-2090. **96.**

Laherte Frères “Ultradition Brut” NV (Chavot)

The new release of Laherte Frères “Ultradition Brut” is composed of its customary *cépages* of sixty percent pinot meunier, thirty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. It is from the base year of the excellent vintage of 2015, with forty percent of the blend composed of reserve wines from the previous two years. It was disgorged in September of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of seven grams per liter. The bouquet is pure and complex, delivering scents of apple, white peach, brioche, lovely soil tones, a wisp of smokiness and a topnote of meunier’s lovely floral tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex, focused and already beautifully expressive, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. 2019-2045. **91+.**

Laherte Frères “les Longues Voyes” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV (Chavot)

The new release of Aurélien Laherte’s les Longues Voyes is composed entirely of pinot noir from vineyards on the Montagne de Reims and the *vins clairs* spent fully nineteen months aging in casks prior to its bottling for second fermentation. It was disgorged in February of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of four grams per liter. The wine shows a bit of an oaky personality as a result of its extended *elevage* in cask prior to bottling, but the wood is seamlessly buried in the other elements of the wine. The bouquet is complex and vibrant, offering up scents of white peach, *patissière*, lovely floral tones, chalky soil and a nice touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with an excellent core, refined *mousse* and a very long, young, complex and gently oaky finish. This wine really carries its oak very well, and though it is present, it is presented in a very elegant and balanced manner. Fine juice, but give it a few more years’ worth of bottle age to fully blossom. 2023-2055. **92.**

Lancelot-Pienne “Accord Majeur” Brut NV (Cramant)

Lancelot-Pienne’s non-vintage Brut bottling of “Accord Majeur” is composed from a *cépages* of seventy percent pinot meunier, twenty percent chardonnay and ten percent pinot noir. It is aged four years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and is still from the base year of 2012, again, with twenty percent of the blend composed of reserve wines. The bouquet is starting to show some lovely evolution in its constellation of white peach, apple, meunier floral tones, brioche, a

beautiful base of soil tones, dried flowers and a whisper of upper register nuttiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely deep at the core, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, complex finish. This is very refined in personality and nicely light on its feet, yet with fine intensity of flavor. 2019-2040. **91.**

Nicolas Maillart “Platine” Brut NV (Écueil)

The current release of Nicolas Maillart “Platine” non-vintage Brut was disgorged in March of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine offers up a lovely and expressive nose of apple, a touch of lemon zest, chalky minerality, wheat toast, white flowers and a touch of gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and nicely snappy with acidity, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and fine focus and grip on the long and nascently complex finish. This is a lovely wine of impeccable balance and blossoming complexity- a fine example of non-vintage Brut. 2019-2035. **91.**

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

The current release of Moutard Père et Fils “Grande Cuvée” non-vintage Brut was disgorged in September of 2018 and is from the base year of 2014. As always, it composed entirely of pinot noir and offers up a bright and complex bouquet of peach, smoke, *patissière*, chalky minerality, a touch of flint, a nice dollop of nutskin and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and nicely soil-driven, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, well-balanced and classy finish. This has plenty of personality. 2019-2035+. **91.**

Mouzon-Leroux “l’Atavique” Extra Brut NV (Verzy)

The new release of Mouzon-Leroux “l’Atavique” non-vintage Extra Brut is from the base year of 2013 and was finished off with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. It was disgorged in May of 2017 and is its customary blend of sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay. The wine offers up a fine, youthful nose of white peach, apple, steely minerality, bread dough and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core of fruit, very refined *mousse*, snappy acids and excellent length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This is certainly approachable today, but it is still a puppy and will drink with more generosity with two or three years in the cellar. Fine juice. 2018-2035+. **92.**

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

The bottling of Philipponnat “Royale Réserve” non-vintage Brut currently in the market is from the base year of 2014, spent three and a half years aging *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter (gotta love transparency from a *Grande Marque*). The *cépages* this year is sixty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier and was made entirely from the first press juice (*cuvée*). Between twenty and thirty percent of the blend are composed of reserve wines from the *maison’s* solera. The nose here is deep and beautifully complex, delivering a fine constellation of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, a nice touch of *patissière*, gentle smokiness and a very discreet floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and zesty, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the still fairly youthful finish. The nose right now is open and superb, but the wine is still a tad closed on the palate and it would not be remiss to tuck this wine away in the cellar for three or four years and really let it blossom properly. This is clearly now one of the best Brut NVs produced by one of the *Grandes Marques*. 2021-2050. **92.**



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

The non-vintage Brut bottling of Ployez-Jacquemart is always one of my favorite examples of this genre and the new release is right up to its customary standards. This cuvée was disgorged in October of 2018 and offers up an excellent bouquet of pear, delicious apple, fresh almond, complex soil tones, brioche and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the still youthful and vibrant finish. Today, the palate is lagging just a touch behind the nose in terms of expressiveness and this wine will be even better with a little time in the cellar to blossom more fully on the palate. 2020-2050. **91+**.

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

The new release of Extra Brut NV from Maxime Ponson is still base year of 2013, but this version spent another nine months aging *sur latte* and was disgorged in September of 2018. The *cépages* is forty percent pinot meunier, thirty-five percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent pinot noir and the finishing *dosage* is five grams per liter. The wine is beautifully expressive on the nose, delivering scents of white peach, warm bread, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still nicely racy, with a fine core, frothy *mousse* and lovely balance and grip on the long and complex finish. This is a lovely bottle. 2019-2045+. **91+**.

Éric Rodez “Cuvée des Crayères” Brut NV (Ambonnay)

Éric Rodez’s “Cuvée des Crayères” is composed of a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay. About twenty-five percent of the *vins clairs* for this bottling are barrel-fermented and at least forty percent of the cuvée is made up of reserve wines. This bottling was disgorged in March of 2017 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is initially a bit blocked aromatically by sulfur, but eventually blossoms to offer up scents of peach, apple, *patissière*, a fine base of soil tones and a touch of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, and youthful, with a solid core, elegant *mousse* and good length and grip on the well balanced finish. This could do with a few years in the cellar to properly blossom. 2020-2040. **90.**

Éric Rodez Blanc de Noirs Brut NV (Ambonnay)

This one hundred percent pinot noir bottling is very impressive. The *vins clairs* here are seventy percent barrel-fermented in five to six year-old casks, and these *vins clairs* do not go through malo. This bottling was disgorged in February of 2017 and received a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The nose offers up a fine mélange of white peach, *patissière*, apple, complex, chalky soil tones, a touch of smoke, discreet oak and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and wide open and ready to drink today, with a good core, lovely *mousse* and good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is drinking very well already, but shows the structure to also age quite gracefully. Good juice. 2019-2040. **91+.**

Marquis de Sade Brut NV (Michel Gonet- Mesnil-sur-Oger)

This was the last bottle of a six pack of Marquis de Sade non-vintage Brut that I purchased about fifteen years ago and had cellared. The wine aged very well indeed and this last bottle had plenty of life still in it, offering up a pure and tertiary bouquet of walnuts, wizened apples, rye toast, chalky minerality, a bit of barley and a topnote of orange peel. On the palate the wine is still quite crisp and full, offering lovely complexity, with gently fading *mousse*, good focus and balance and a long, tasty finish. The *cépages* here is seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir and the wine has evolved into a very dignified old age since I last drank a bottle back in 2011. 2019-2025+. **89.**

Frédéric Savart “l’Accomplie” Extra Brut NV (Écueil)

This particular bottle of Frédéric Savart’s “l’Accomplie” Extra Brut was drunk at a restaurant in Manhattan in May and is probably the previous release of the wine, as it was disgorged in April of 2017 and I suspect that there is a new bottling now out in the market. I will write to the importer and try to review that release for the next iteration of this report. This particular bottle was drinking beautifully, being composed of its customary *cépages* of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay. The bouquet today is wide open and nicely expressive, offering up scents of apple, white peach, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a good core, refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the vibrant finish. A lovely example. 2019-2035. **91.**

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

This particular bottle of the Camille Savès “Carte d’Or” was the 2013 release and had been in a friend’s cellar for five years. The wine is a blend of Bouzy fruit from the family’s vineyards, with the *cépages* seventy-five percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent chardonnay. This bottle was showing beautifully with five years of bottle age on it, offering up a mature nose of baked apples and peaches, gentle nuttiness, fresh-baked bread and a lovely base of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely tertiary in flavor profile, with a good core,

still snappy acids, pinpoint bubbles and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is a very good moment in its evolution for drinking this wine, but there is still plenty of life in it. 2019-2029. **90.**

Camille Savès “les Loges” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV (Bouzy)

Unfortunately, there was no information about the date of disgorgement on this bottle, which is a beautiful pinot noir based cuvée from the *climat* of les Loges in Bouzy. The wine was finished with less than five grams of *dosage* and offers up a complex and vibrant bouquet of white peach, apple, *patissière*, refined soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and nicely detailed, with a lovely core, excellent mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. First class juice that is drinking nicely today and will age effortlessly for a couple of decades. 2019-2040+. **92.**

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

Jean-Marc Sélèque’s current release of his “Solessence” non-vintage Extra Brut is marked as “Lot 2015”, as fifty percent of the cuvée is from this base year, blended with an equal amount of his solera. The wine’s *cépages* is fifty percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and ten percent pinot noir and it was finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter, after its disgorgement in December of 2017. The bouquet is pure and flat out stunning, jumping from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, a touch of buttery oak, almond paste, a complex mosaic of chalky soil tones and a delicate topnote of fresh nutmeg. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and balance, elegant *mousse*, bright acids and excellent backend mineral drive on the long and complex finish. This bottling has been getting drier in the last few years (the 2013 base year was finished with seven grams per liter of *dosage*), but particularly with the top flight vintage of 2015 to work with, the balance remains outstanding. This is stellar non-vintage Extra Brut! 2019-2045+. **93.**

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

This is a bottle of the Autumn 2009 release of Folies de la Marquetterie from Taittinger, which was the first incarnation of this single vineyard bottling from the *maison* that I had the pleasure to taste. A friend sampled the wine with me back in September of 2009 and ended up buying and cellaring a case and was kind enough to pull out a bottle for us to share this past January. So this wine had been tucked away in his cellar for the last nine years and had a chance to truly blossom. It is drinking beautifully today, offering up a pure and wide open bouquet of tangerine, apple, a complex base of soil tones, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, complex and beautifully generous on the attack, with a fine core, vibrant *mousse* and excellent cut and grip on the long, complex and impeccably balanced finish. This is now into its plateau of peak maturity, but is still in climbing mode and may be even better with another five years’ worth of bottle age. It still has decades of life ahead of it. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2040. **93.**

Champagne Tarlant “Brut Réserve” NV (Oeuilly)

I love all of Benoît Tarlant’s wines and the new release of his non-vintage Brut Réserve is from the base year of 2009 and was disgorged in February of 2016. How many *vignerons* age their non-vintage Brut six years *sur latte*? The *dosage* this year is 5.8 grams per liter, which is right in the heart of my comfort zone and the wine was showing beautifully. The *cépages* here is its customary one-third each of chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier and the wine offers up a superb bouquet of lemon, apple, complex minerality, *patissière* and a lovely floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and crisp, with a fine core of fruit, very elegant *mousse*

and impressive length and grip on the poised and complex finish. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2040. **92+.**

Marie Weiss Brut NV (Ludes)

As I have mentioned in the past, the Marie Weiss label is produced by the superb small house of Ployez-Jacquemart and is their bottling made from purchased grapes. The current release was disgorged in October of 2018 and is composed of a blend of fifty percent pinot noir and twenty-five percent each of chardonnay and pinot meunier. It is from the base year of 2014 and was finished with just under six grams per liter of *dosage*. The wine shows the lovely floral elements of pinot meunier in its complex nose of pear, apple, acacia blossoms, a touch of lilac, warm bread, a whisper of buttery oak and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and light on its feet, with a good core, elegant *mousse*, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex finish. This is a fine value year in and year out and this rendition is no exception. 2019-2040+. **90.**

Brut and Extra Brut Rosé NV

Barnaut “Authentique” Brut Rosé NV (Bouzy)

The new release of Barnaut “Authentique” non-vintage Brut Rosé was disgorged in June of 2018 and is from the base year of 2015. The wine is made by the *saignée* method and is composed of a blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with all of the fruit grown in the grand cru village of Bouzy. It was finished with a *dosage* around six grams per liter and offers up a deeper, salmon color and a lovely, gently vinous nose of blood orange, rhubarb, beautiful soil tones, a nice touch of spice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with good mineral drive, frothy *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the zesty finish. This is made to drink throughout the meal and is really a fine example. 2019-2040+. **91.**

Bernard Brémont Brut Rosé NV (Ambonnay)

I drank this bottle in Beaune in November of 2018, so this is the autumn release of Bernard Brémont Brut Rosé from that year (though there is still no date of disgorgement in formation on the labels). The wine is its traditional blend of eighty percent pinot noir and twenty percent chardonnay, with ten percent of the pinot being still red wine from Ambonnay and spends twenty-four to thirty months aging *sur latte* in the cellars. The current release is quite lovely, offering up a vibrant nose of strawberries, tangerine, chalky minerality, rose petals, orange zest and a lovely touch of upper register spice. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a good core of fruit, quite elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. This is not as dark in color as the version I drank a couple of years ago and is a more classical pale salmon color. Very good juice and a fine bargain- at least in Beaune! 2019-2033+. **91.**

R. H. Coutier “Cuvée Rosé” Brut NV (Ambonnay)

R. H. Coutier “Cuvée Rosé” non-vintage Brut currently gracing the market is from the base year of 2013, but includes forty percent reserve wines in the blend. Its *cépages* is fifty-fifty chardonnay and pinot noir and the wine was disgorged in June of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The color is a lovely, deep salmon and the nose is a bright and complex blend of cherries, a touch of rhubarb, wheat toast, chalky minerality, gentle smokiness, dried rose petals and a lovely touch of upper register spiciness. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and

very good focus and grip on the long, complex and minerally finish. This is a great bottle of Brut Rosé to serve through the whole meal! 2019-2040+. **92.**

Gatinois Brut Rosé NV (Aÿ)

The new release of Gatinois non-vintage Brut Rosé also has a sleek new package and hails from the base year of 2014. It is composed of a mix of ninety percent pinot noir (a small amount of this still pinot noir sourced from sixty year-old vines and raised for one year in older Burgundy barrel) and ten percent chardonnay. It was disgorged in June of 2018 and finished off with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The nose here wafts from the glass in a vibrant, gently vinous constellation of tangerine, white cherry, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones, rye toast and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and complex, with superb depth at the core, lovely mineral undertow, pinpoint bubbles and a long, zesty and complex finish. This is made to accompany a meal, as it has the depth of Aÿ pinot and is really quite good. 2019-2040. **91+.**



Alfred Gratien Brut Rosé NV (Épernay)

The current release of Alfred Gratien non-vintage Brut Rosé was disgorged in February of 2018 and is composed of a *cépages* of forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir. The wine is quite classy on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of strawberries, a touch of tangerine, blood orange, chalky soil tones, bread dough, a hint of caraway seed and a floral topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is crisp,

full-bodied, focused and very elegant in profile, with a good core, lovely *mousse*, bright, well-integrated acids and a long, complex and refined finish. This is very lovely juice. 2019-2040. **91.**
Henriot Brut Rosé NV (Reims)

The new release of Henriot's non-vintage Brut Rosé is a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, with the exact *cépages* not given, but probably about fifty-five percent pinot and forty-five percent chardonnay. The wine is quite lovely, offering up an elegant bouquet of strawberries, tangerine, chalky minerality, fresh-baked bread and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely deep at the core, with refined *mousse*, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is really quite tasty. 2019-2040+. **91.**

Krug Rosé “23^{ème} Édition” Brut NV (Reims)

The Krug Rosé “23^{ème} Édition” is the deepest-colored release of this bottling that I can recall, as this wine since its debut has routinely been one of the most delicately-tinted examples of Rosé to be found in all of Champagne. However, the new release is quite a bit deeper salmon in color than previous iterations, though no less elegant and refined. *Chef de Cave* Eric Lebel and his team at Krug utilized a bit more still pinot noir in the blend this year than in past examples, which no doubt contributes to the slightly darker hue of this release. The new edition was disgorged in the spring of 2017 and includes a blend of vintages from 2011 all the way back to 2000. Because the base year of 2011 was far from typical, fully fifty-six percent of the cuvée this year is composed of reserve wines, with the final *cépages* working out to be forty-five percent chardonnay, twenty-nine percent pinot noir and twenty-six percent pinot meunier. The wine is aromatically stunning, soaring from the glass in a refined blend of cherries, a touch of tangerine, smoky overtones, rose petals, a beautiful base of gently salty soil elements, lovely and almost exotic spice tones and a hint of rye toast in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and exquisitely complex, with a lovely core of fruit, great soil signature, bright, seamless acids, pinpoint bubbles and great length and grip on the classy and gently vinous finish. Outstanding juice. 2019-2050+. **94+.**

Krug Rosé “22^{ème} Édition” Brut NV (Reims)

I had not tasted a bottle of the Krug Rosé “22^{ème} Édition” is a year or so and was really happy to cross paths with one shortly after tasting the newest release, number 23, as it gave the possibility of putting the new release in its historical context. The 22^{ème} Édition is a very classical and refined example of this lovely cuvée, offering a deep and complex bouquet of tangerine, white cherry, gentle spice tones, orange peel, a gorgeous base of soil tones, dried rose petals and a discreetly smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with very refined *mousse*, excellent bounce and grip and a very long, complex and seamlessly balanced, vibrant finish. This is great wine, and though there is not much difference qualitatively between the two most recent editions of Krug Rosé, stylistically, I have a slight preference for the 22^{ème} Édition. 2019-2050+. **95.**

Laherte Frères “Rosé de Meunier” Extra Brut NV (Chavot)

The Laherte Frères “Rosé de Meunier” non-vintage Extra Brut currently on the market is a fifty-fifty blend of base years 2016 and 2015. Aurélien Laherte approaches this wine quite uniquely, as its one hundred percent pinot meunier composition is made of sixty percent wine made with no skin contact, thirty percent with a bit of maceration on the skins and ten percent is still red wine. This new release was disgorged in April of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of 2.5 grams per liter. It is a deeper salmon color than many Rosés and offers up a lovely bouquet of cherries, blood orange, a nice touch of rhubarb, gentle smokiness, complex soil tones, a touch of

meunier floral delicacy and a lovely topnote of spice elements. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and beautifully complex, with a lovely core, excellent balance and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, gently vinous and exquisite finish. This is outstanding juice. 2019-2040. **92.**

Marguet Père et Fils “Shaman 16” Rosé Brut Nature NV (Ambonnay)

It is not intuitive, but Benoît Marguet always prefers to make his Rosé bottlings from a predominance of chardonnay, with his Shaman 16 version composed of fully ninety-six percent chardonnay, with the remainder still red wine made from pinot noir. The *vins clairs* for this bottling spent a bit longer in cask than is generally customary in Champagne, as they were not bottled up for the second fermentation until August of 2017, and the wine was disgorged in April of 2019. It is showing beautifully out of the blocks, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of tangerine, blood orange, bread dough, chalky soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and very elegant in profile, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, refined *mousse* and lovely focus and grip on the long and perfectly balanced finish. First class Rosé. 2019-2040+. **92.**

Pierre Moncuit “Grand Cru” Rosé Brut NV (Le Mesnil sur Oger)

The current bottle on the market of Pierre Moncuit non-vintage Brut Rosé was disgorged in June of 2018. The wine is a blend of seventy-five percent chardonnay (all from Mesnil) and twenty-five percent still pinot noir (all hailing from Ambonnay). The wine is entirely from the fine base year of 2015 and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is already quite lovely, offering up a complex nose of tangerine, cherries, a touch of rhubarb, chalky minerality, rye bread, a nice touch of spice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite elegant in personality, though still on the young side and a tad bound up in its structural elements. The wine has lovely depth at the core, refined *mousse*, bright acids and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. It is certainly quite drinkable today, but it is still a bit tight and will be even better with a couple of years in the cellar to really let it blossom from behind its very good girdle of acidity. This will be very lovely with a bit of bottle age. 2021-2040. **91.**

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

The new release of Philipponnat’s “Royale Réserve Rosé” non-vintage Brut is not quite up to the quality of last year’s version, but that was from the base year of 2012 and that is a very special vintage in the region. This is from the base year of 2013 and was disgorged in January of 2018, having spent three and a half years *sur latte* and was finished with a *dosage* of nine grams per liter. The *cépages* is seventy-five percent pinot noir (seven percent still red wine), twenty percent chardonnay and five percent pinot meunier, with a quarter of the blend composed of reserve wines from the house’s solera system. The wine offers up a very pretty nose of strawberries, melon, a touch of rhubarb, chalky soil tones and a discreet floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and nicely mineral on the backend, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a well-balanced, vibrant finish. The *dosage* is fairly generous, but nicely offset by good minerality and bright acids. This is a very good bottle, but last year’s version, based on the 2012 vintage, had just a bit more dimension. 2019-2035. **90.**

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut Rosé NV (Ludes)

The current release of Ployez-Jacquemart’s non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé is comprised of its customary blend of fifty percent chardonnay, thirty-seven percent pinot noir and thirteen percent pinot meunier, with ten percent of the pinot noir being still red wine, which is raised in cask prior to its incorporation in the cuvée. I do not have the precise detail on the *dosage*, but

assume it is again around four grams per liter, as was the case with last year's version. The wine hails from the base year of 2014 and was disgorged in July of 2018. It offers up a beautifully expressive bouquet of strawberries, tangerine, a hint of rhubarb, a fine base of soil, rye toast, gentle spice tones and a bit of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with excellent *mousse*, bright acids, impeccable balance and a long, complex and vibrant finish. Non-vintage Rosé Champagne does not get better than this, unless it is Krug! 2019-2045. **92+**.

Jean-Marc Sélèque “Solessence” Extra Brut Rosé (Pierry)

The new release of Jean-Marc Sélèque's “Solessence” Extra Brut Rosé is Lot 2016 and obviously, hails from that vintage. It is comprised of a blend of forty-five percent chardonnay, forty percent pinot meunier and fifteen percent pinot noir and was disgorged in July of 2018, with a finishing *dosage* of three grams per liter. The wine is superb on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering a fine combination of strawberries, rhubarb, orange zest, chalky soil tones, rye bread and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a rock solid core, frothy *mousse* and great length and grip on the complex and focused finish. This is first class Rosé! 2019-2045+. **92+**.



Vintage-Dated Blanc de Blancs

2014 Marguet Père et Fils “les Bermonts” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Ambonnay)

The 2014 single vineyard bottling of les Bermonts from Benoît Marguet is outstanding. This was disgorged in March of 2019, so it is still a puppy, but its future greatness is already quite apparent. The bouquet offers up a youthfully complex blend of white peach, passion fruit, fresh apricot, gently musky floral tones, a very complex base of soil and a touch of incipient *patissière* in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very minerally out of the blocks, with an excellent core of fruit, lovely focus and grip, refined *mousse* and great length and grip on the poised and perfectly balanced finish. Give this the bottle age that it deserves! 2024-2060. **94+**.

2014 Marguet Père et Fils “le Parc” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (Ambonnay)

As I have mentioned in the past, the *lieu à dit* of le Parc in Ambonnay is also where the Clos d'Ambonnay is found, so this is pretty special *terroir*. Benoît Marguet crafts a one hundred percent chardonnay cuvée from his parcels here and the 2014 version is outstanding. The nose wafts from the glass in a complex constellation of apple, pear, a touch of apricot, brioche, a beautifully complex base of soil, spring flowers and a touch of pastry cream hovering in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and seamless in its balance, with a rock solid core, superb focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, very pure and classy finish. First class juice, the 2014 le Parc is not quite as structured out of the blocks as the les Bermonts and will be the single vineyard that drinks with the most generosity at an earlier date. 2021-2060. **94**.

2013 Lilbert-Fils “Grand Cru” Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Cramant)

The 2013 Lilbert-Fils Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime hails entirely from the family vineyard parcels in Cramant. It was disgorged in December of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of three grams per liter. This is still quite a young wine and needs some bottle age to properly blossom, but it shows fine potential in its aromatic constellation of apple, pear, chalky soil tones, bread dough and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and tightly-knit out of the blocks, with a good core, frothy *mousse* and a long, minerally and still quite youthful finish. Have patience, as this bottle will be very good in due course. 2024-2055. **91+**.

2012 Ayala “Le Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The new release of 2012 Ayala “Le Blanc de Blancs” Brut Millésime is one of the finest bottles I have ever tasted from this excellent house. The wine spent five years aging *sur latte* and was disgorged in March of 2018 (I do not have information on its *dosage*, but it was judicious). The bouquet is pure and beautifully expressive already, wafting from the glass in a refined mix of delicious apple, pear, fresh almond, chalky minerality, hints of the smokiness to come and a lovely topnote of white lilies. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the poised and vibrant finish. The ripeness of the 2012 vintage dovetails perfectly in this wine with the non-malo style at Champagne Ayala! 2019-2040+. **93+**.

2012 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre de Vertus” Blanc de Blanc Brut Nature (Vertus)

The 2012 Larmandier-Bernier “Terre de Vertus” is a very good, young wine. The bouquet offers up a nascently complex blend of pear, apple, a touch of almond paste, chalky minerality and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and shows off a nice touch of fruit generosity on the attack, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and a fairly long,

promising finish. This is not quite as long and precise out of the blocks as some other recent vintages of Terre de Vertus, but there is a lot to like here and it is uncharacteristically already pretty tasty out of the blocks. 2019-2045+. **91+**.

2012 Champagne Suenen “les Robarts” Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut (Cramant)

I have been looking forward to the release of the les Robarts since I first tasted it in its infancy in the Suenen cellars back in the spring of 2015. Four years later, it is finally out! Aurélien Suenen disgorged this fairly early on in its evolution, back in June of 2017, and then held it in the cellars in bottle for more than a year before releasing it, with a finishing *dosage* of one gram per liter. The *lieu à dit* of les Robarts lies on the Cramant-Avize border at the southern end of Cramant, and in fact, the vineyard is shared between the two communes and the lion's share actually lies in Avize. The wine has turned out beautifully, offering up a pure and complex bouquet of pear, apple, a hint of tangerine, hazelnut, a marvelously complex base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very refined in profile, with a superb core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and great focus, cut and grip on the supremely long and complex finish. This has the lovely, ripe fruit of the 2012 vintage to buffer the fine structural chassis here, so it will not demand too many years in the cellar before it starts to hit on all cylinders. That said, it is still probably at least a full decade away from reaching its apogee. 2022-2060+. **94+**.

2009 Champagne Corbon “les Bacchantes” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

The les Bacchantes bottling is a new cuvée from Agnès Corbon, with all of the *vins clairs* for this bottling aged in older Burgundy casks for their *elevage*, rather than the stainless steel tanks that have been customary at Champagne Corbon during her father's long tenure. The *vins clairs* were aged fully nine months in barrel prior to bottling for the secondary fermentation, with the wine disgorged in February of 2019 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. Despite the barrels being several years of age when Agnès Corbon purchased them, they have given the wine just a hint of butteriness on both the nose and palate and which is very, very attractive. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of apple, pear, hazelnuts, chalky soil tones, fresh-baked bread and the aforementioned hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and shows off lovely depth at the core, with refined *mousse*, excellent focus and grip and a long, beautifully balanced and very elegant finish. This is outstanding! 2019-2050. **92+**.

2008 Jacquesson “Avize- Champ Caïn” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Dizy)

The single vineyard bottling of Champ Caïn in Avize hails from a *lieu à dit* located at the bottom of the slope in this commune, with a due south exposition and the Chiquet brothers owning 1.3 hectares of vines planted in 1962. It was bottled in May of 2009 and disgorged nine years later, in April of 2018, with a finishing *dosage* in this vintage of 2.5 grams per liter. The wine is flat out brilliant on the nose, soaring from the glass in a very deep and complex blend of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, complex, limestone minerality, a touch of nuttiness, incipient smokiness and a gentle bass note of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with great mineral drive, impeccable focus and balance, elegant *mousse* and a very long, zesty and complex finish. This is stellar juice! 2019-2050+. **94+**.



2008 Jacquesson “Dizy Corne Bautray” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut Millésime (Dizy)

The *climat* of Corne Bautray is up at the summit of a steep vineyard slope in Dizy and the Chiquet family’s one hectare parcel here is planted completely to chardonnay. It has a fairly deep layer of clay topsoil, pockmarked with pebbly scree, over the mother rock of limestone in Dizy. The vines were planted in 1960, making these old vines the same age as this correspondent. The parcel in 2008 was picked on September 28th, was bottled the following May and was not disgorged until April of 2018, giving the wine a full nine years aging *sur latte*. It received no finishing *dosage* in this vintage. The bouquet is beautiful, offering up a refined and quite complex constellation of pear, almond, a touch of buttery oak, detailed soil tones, dried flowers, hints of citrus zest and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is still a bit youthfully brisk, with a full-bodied and nicely soil-driven personality, a rock solid core, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and nicely structured finish. With its zero *dosage*, the wine is a bit more youthfully inclined than its two other 2008 single vineyard counterparts and really will demand a bit of time in the cellar to start drink with more generosity. But, the balance here is impeccable and once the acids soften just a bit more, it is going to be an outstanding drink (though Brut Nature lovers will be delighted with it already). 2021-2050+. **94.**

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

The 2008 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut was disgorged in October of 2018, after having spent more than nine and half years aging *sur latte*. The wine delivers a beautifully complex bouquet of pear, delicious apples, almond, chalky soil tones, hints of *crème*

patissière and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, and rock solid at the core, with fine mineral drive, excellent *mousse* and a long, dry and beautifully balanced finish. This is a superb wine that is quite tasty at age ten, but clearly is still climbing and will be even better five to ten years down the road. Impressive. 2019-2050. **92+**.

2007 Champagne Corbon “Grande Millésime” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Avize)

Given that the Corbon family always ages their vintage-dated wines nearly ten years prior to release, this 2007 is the very first wine that the estate has introduced into the market that was principally crafted by Agnès Corbon, who had been working alongside of her father for a few years already, but was really starting to take over the winemaking with the 2007 vintage. The wine is cut in the classic family style of no malolactic fermentation and a lovely, racy structure, offering up a beautiful bouquet of pear, almond, a touch of tangerine, brioche and an excellent base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a lovely core of fruit, refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the perfectly balanced and precise finish. This is starting to really drink well at age twelve, but like all of the vintage-dated Corbon bottlings, will continue to cruise along beautifully for many decades to come and will be even better to drink eight to ten years down the road. This bottle was disgorged in February of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. 2019-2060. **93+**.

2004 Larmandier-Bernier “V. V. de Cramant” Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (Avize)

The 2004 Larmandier-Bernier “V. V. de Cramant” is drinking very well at age fifteen, offering up a pure, complex and beautifully developed bouquet of pear, hazelnut, chalky soil tones, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and perfectly ready to drink, with a good core, lovely *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. Good juice that has now reached its apogee and is wide open in personality, but still has at least a decade (and probably more) of fine, fine drinking ahead of it. 2019-2030+. **92**.

1996 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 1996 Comtes de Champagne continues to drink beautifully, with the nose and palate now starting to really blossom nicely and the well-integrated chassis of the vintage’s acidity providing precision and lift on the backend. The bouquet is starting to transition into maturity, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of apple, pear, a touch of orange zest, salty minerality, brioche and a delicate topnote of nutskin. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with racy acids, a lovely core of fruit, fine mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, very refined finish. A great bottle of Comtes that is still in climbing mode, but getting closer to its apogee. 2019-2060. **97**.

1995 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

For current drinking, the 1995 Comtes de Champagne is one of the vintages of this iconic bottling that I would reach for first, as the wine is now into its plateau of peak maturity and really drinking with style and grace today. The complex nose offers up a mature constellation of pear, hazelnut, fresh-baked bread, chalky minerality and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open and generous on the attack, with an excellent core, elegant *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the focused, complex and utterly refined finish. Great juice. 2019-2045+. **95+**.

1995 Charles Heidsieck “Blanc des Millenaires” Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 1995 Charles Heidsieck “Blanc des Millenaires” is now fully into its apogee of peak maturity and will probably start looking over the far side of its plateau in the not too distant future, so this is a very good time to be drinking it up. The wine is fully mature on both the nose and palate, offering up an aromatic constellation of baked apples and peaches, warm biscuits, chalky soil tones, gentle smokiness and a topnote of caraway seed. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and getting a bit tertiary, with a hint of caramel now starting to poke through on the backend, but still a good core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the complex finish. This is at its peak and will not stay there forever, so this is a great time to be sharing bottles. 2019-2030+. **92.**

1990 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime (Reims)

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 1990 Comtes de Champagne in five years and I was very happy to see the wine cruising along beautifully and at the peak of its powers. The bottle was served in succession to the 1996 and 1995 versions and the 1990 really showed well amongst very stiff competition. There seems to be a bit more mid-palate power to the 1990 than these other two vintages, as well as the first vestiges of tertiary development in the aromatic and flavor spectrums. The very complex bouquet delivers scents of sweet walnut, pear, tangerine, gentle smokiness, chalky minerality and a touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and absolutely rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, complex and still quite vibrant finish. This is now at its apogee, but has decades of life still ahead of it. 2019-2045+. **95.**

Vintage-Dated Brut and Extra Brut

2014 Domaine Georges Laval “Cumières” Brut Nature Millésime (Cumières)

The 2014 vintage-dated bottling of Cumières from Vincent Laval hails from a single vineyard parcel called la Cave Thomas in the commune, which lies on the border with the neighboring village of Hautvillers, though the name of the vineyard does not appear on the label. It is composed of a blend of fifty-eight percent pinot noir and forty-two percent chardonnay in 2014. The nose is gorgeous, jumping from the glass in a blaze of passions fruit, apple, tangerine, complex minerality, a touch of warm biscuits and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and already very complex, with excellent mineral drive and grip, pinpoint bubbles, snappy acids and great focus and grip on the very long, perfectly balanced finish. This is outstanding juice in the making! I am not sure of which formats Monsieur Laval bottled this in, as the gents at his importer, Transatlantic Bubbles, poured in from jeroboam! 2022-2060+. **94.**

2014 Marguet Père et Fils “les Crayères” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Ambonnay)

The les Crayères is often my favorite single vineyard wine in his lineup, but as these 2014s had only arrived five days before we tasted them, the new release of les Crayères seemed still a bit shaken from its recent transatlantic voyage and so I did not review this bottle and will report on the wine in the next feature on Champagne, once the wine has settled in again from its travels.

2014 Marguet Père et Fils “Saints-Rémys” Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature (Ambonnay)

The Saints-Rémys bottling is the newest single vineyard in Benoît Marguet’s excellent roster and it makes its debut in the 2014 vintage. Saints-Rémys lies high up on the slope in Ambonnay, not far from the Bouzy border on the southern side of the village. Monsieur Marguet

is making a Blanc de Noirs entirely from pinot noir in this parcel, with the 2014 having been disgorged in March of 2019. The wine is absolutely stellar on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet offering up scents of white peach, a hint of passion fruit, *patissière*, complex soil tones and a lovely topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a long, refined and very classy finish. Welcome to the family! 2019-2050+. **94+**.



2013 Marguet Père et Fils “Ambonnay” Brut Nature Millésime (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet’s 2013 vintage bottling from Ambonnay is outstanding. This is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir and was disgorged in May of 2018. The wine offers up a pure and youthful nose of apple, white peach, stony minerality, *patissière*, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, complex and beautifully balanced, with a full-bodied and nicely soil-driven format. The core is pure and solid, the *mousse* exemplary and the finish long, complex and vibrant. This is first class juice, made from the family domaine’s own vineyards in their home village of Ambonnay. Give it at least a few more years of bottle age to let it blossom properly! 2022-2055. **93+**.

2013 Marguet Père et Fils “Bouzy” Brut Nature Millésime (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet makes a several different “village-named” bottlings, with the Bouzy cuvée hailing entirely from the domaine’s own parcels in this commune. The *cépages* of the 2013 Bouzy is seventy-seven percent pinot noir and twenty-three chardonnay and the wine was disgorged also in May of 2018. This is a very lovely wine, offering up a youthfully complex bouquet of orchard fruit, smoke, bread dough, a fine, complex base of soil tones and a touch of fresh apricot hinting in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and zesty, with a fine core, good transparency down to the soil, with excellent focus and grip, pinpoint bubbles and lovely balance on the long, complex and classy finish. This is close to fully blossoming, but try to give it a few more years in the cellar. 2021-2050+. **93.**

2013 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Partition” Extra Brut Millésime (Pierry)

The 2013 Jean-Marc Sélèque “Partition” is made from one cask lots from seven distinct vineyards in four different villages- Vertus, Épernay, Dizy, Mardeuil and three from his home commune of Pierry. The *cépages* of the 2013 is seventy-two percent chardonnay and fourteen percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented. Jean-Marque ages the wine under cork, rather than crown cap, and it was disgorged in September of 2018 after four and a half years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of two grams per liter. The wine is showing gorgeous potential, soaring from the glass in a refined mix of apple, pear, a touch of hazelnut, complex, salty soil elements, gentle floral tones and just a hint of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core, refined *mousse* and a very long, focused and elegant finish that shows fine backend lift and grip. This is still youthfully racy and needs some bottle age to further unfold, but it is going to be stunning wine when it is fully ready to go! 2023-2060. **94.**

2012 Philipponnat Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2012 Philipponnat Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut is composed entirely of pinot noir and was disgorged in May of 2018 and finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams. The wine is excellent, offering up a complex bouquet of white peach, apple, smoky overtones, bread dough, a lovely base of soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core, elegant *mousse*, lovely complexity and a long, poised and vibrant finish. 2019-2050+. **92.**

2012 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Ludes)

The 2012 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut is a fifty-fifty blend of pinot noir and pinot meunier, hailing from premier cru parcels in Ludes and grand cru parcels in Mailly. The wine is very elegant aromatically, offering up a superb, refined bouquet of white peach, apple, chalky soil tones, *patissière*, spring flowers and just a whisper of buttery oak from the *vins clairs* that were raised in cask. On the palate the wine is bright, focused and full-bodied, with excellent depth at the core, elegant *mousse*, fine precision and purity and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. Great juice that should age superbly well, but is already quite tasty out of the blocks. 2019-2050+. **92.**

2011 Cédric Bouchard Blanc de Noirs “les Ursules” Extra Brut (Celles-sur-Ource)

Cédric Bouchard’s 2011 Roses de Jeanne “les Ursules” was disgorged in April of 2015 and is drinking beautifully today. This is really a fine bottle from a difficult vintage, as it offers up a bouquet of white peach, chalky minerality, bread dough, citrus peel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and very well-balanced, with fine focus and grip, very

good *mousse* and impressive length and balance on the zesty finish. My only (minor) complaint with this wine is that it is not particularly complex at the present time, but perhaps this is just a reflection of its relative youth and more complexity will emerge with further bottle age. In terms of length and depth, it is truly outstanding for the 2011 vintage. 2018-2040. **90+**.

2011 Alexandre Filaine “Sensuum Vertigo” Brut Millésime (Damery)

There is nothing “off vintage” about the 2011 Sensuum Vertigo from Fabrice Gass. I had not seen a bottle of this wine in nine months and was very happy to see it again gracing our tasting lineup this past week. The wine is composed of a *cépages* is fifty-five percent pinot noir, thirty percent chardonnay and fifteen percent pinot meunier and was finished with a *dosage* of 5.5 grams per liter. The wine remains youthfully bright and bouncy on both the nose and palate, with the bouquet delivering scents of pear, apple, fresh-baked bread, a very complex base of chalky minerality, *patissière* and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and deep at the core, with a full-bodied and racy profile, lovely *mousse* and excellent focus and grip on the very long and classy finish. This is dynamite Champagne. 2024-2060. **94**.

2009 Marguet Père et Fils “Sapience” Brut Nature (Ambonnay)

I think this may well be my favorite example of Benoît Marguet’s *Tête de Cuvée* of Sapience that he has yet released, or at least, it is the one that is drinking with the most refined generosity out of the blocks. I should note that I missed tasting the 2008 Sapience, which friends have told me has absolutely brilliant potential. In any event, the 2009 is composed of its customary *cépages* of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The bouquet is gorgeous, offering up a deep, complex and very refined blend of white peach, apple, chalky soil tones, *patissière*, gentle floral tones and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and seamless, with marvelous depth at the core, great transparency down to the soil, refined *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the complex, vibrant and laser-like focus. This is a great wine! 2019-2050. **96+**.

2008 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)

I had not crossed paths with a bottle of the 2008 vintage of Dom Pérignon since my visit with Richard Geoffroy last spring at the Abbé de Hautvillers and was very happy to see a bottle pop up at a recent Right Bank Bordeaux tasting to get us out of the blocks in proper style. This is one of the very best young vintages of Dom Pérignon that I have had the pleasure to taste and this is a legend in the making. While the wine is properly tight on the palate today, as most top vintages of this cuvée are for the first couple of decades out from the vintage, there is a sense of creaminess in the mid-palate that augurs very, very well for its future development. The youthful bouquet offers up scents of lemon, quince, a touch of menthol, beautifully complex, salty minerality, lime peel, incipient smokiness and a bit of bread dough in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a superb core, excellent focus and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, energetic and promising finish. Give this at least another six or seven years in the cellar to properly blossom. 2025-2075+. **97+**.

2008 Henriot Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2008 Henriot Brut Millésime is composed of its traditional *cépages* of fifty percent chardonnay and fifty percent pinot noir. It was aged eight years *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of six grams per liter. The wine is beautifully pure on the nose in the style of this lovely vintage, wafting from the glass in a blend of pear, delicious apple, brioche, a touch of almond pastry dough, lovely, chalky soil tones and a bit of orange zest in the upper register. On the

palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and superbly well-balanced, with bright acids, refined *mousse*, a fine core and a long, complex and vibrant finish. This is drinking very well at age eleven, but is still a tad tightly-knit and more mid-palate generosity will emerge with another five year or so in the cellar. Very impressive juice. 2019-2050. **93.**

2008 Jacquesson “Aÿ- Vauzelle Terme” Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut Millésime (Dizy)

The 2008 Jacquesson “Aÿ- Vauzelle Terme” is the smallest of the single vineyard bottlings from the *maison*, as the Chiquet brothers only own three-tenths of a hectare of vines in this *lieu à dit*, which are all planted to pinot noir. The *elevage* of the *vin clair* was completed in May of 2009 and the wine spent nine years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement in April of 2018 and did not receive any *dosage* in this vintage. The bouquet is outstanding, offering up a complex blend of white peach, apple, *patissière*, a hint of the walnut to come, a complex base of soil tones, warm biscuits and a nice touch of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with elegant *mousse*, fine focus and cut and a long, open and very refined finish. This has the shoulders of proper Aÿ pinot noir, but is quite mineral-driven and light on its feet at the same time. Very impressive juice! 2019-2050. **94.**

2008 Philipponnat “Cuvée 1522” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2008 Philipponnat “Cuvée 1522” is starting to really drink at peak form and is absolutely superb on both the nose and palate today. The wine is composed of a blend of fifty-eight percent pinot noir (all hailing from house’s parcel in the excellent *lieu à dit* of Le Léon in Aÿ) and forty-two percent chardonnay from the village of Mesnil-sur-Oger. The *vins clairs* are partially barrel-fermented, with the portion raised in wood not undergoing malo, while the rest of the blend goes through malolactic and is raised in stainless steel. The wine was disgorged in July of 2018 after more than nine years aging *sur latte* and finished with a *dosage* of 4.25 grams per liter. The bouquet is bright and blossoming beautifully, offering up scents of apple, pear, gentle smokiness, a lovely base of chalky soil tones and a topnote of fresh-baked bread. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and wide open on the attack, with a lovely core, excellent cut and grip, refined *mousse* and a very long, very classy and vibrant finish. First class bubbly. 2019-2045. **93.**

2008 Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Brut Vintage” (Ludes)

To my palate, Laurence Ployez makes some of the most refined wines in all of Champagne. Her 2008 Ployez-Jacquemart “Extra Brut Vintage” is composed of a *cépages* of fifty percent chardonnay and twenty-five percent each of pinot noir and pinot meunier and was disgorged in March of 2018, after spending nine years aging *sur latte*. It was finished with a *dosage* of three to four grams per liter. The wine shows lovely complexity and precision on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of pear, apple, a touch of passion fruit, fresh almond, a complex base of soil, brioche and a gently musky floral topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very complex, with a fine core, elegant *mousse* and superb length and grip on the seamlessly balanced finish. Laurence barrel-ferments some of her *vins clairs* for this bottling and there is just a whisper of buttery oak elements to be found on the backend of this very complex wine. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2055. **94.**

2006 Philipponnat “Le Léon” Extra Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

It had been five nearly five years since I last drank a bottle of this lovely, single vineyard bottling from the village of Aÿ. The wine is composed entirely of pinot noir and was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams and this bottle was disgorged in December of 2015. Like so many top

2006 Champagnes, the Le Léon is nicely into its apogee of peak maturity and is drinking very well indeed, with the wide open bouquet wafting from the glass in a mix of apple, peach, a touch of caraway seed, wheat toast, a fine base of soil elements and a touch of sweet nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely complex, with a good core, elegant *mousse* and a long, perfectly balanced and quite refined finish. This is a lovely, lovely bottle of bubbly at its zenith, but still with plenty of life ahead of it. 2019-2040+. **93.**



2005 Henriot “Cuvée Hemera” Brut Millésime (Reims)

The Cuvée Hemera is Henriot’s new name for their *Tête de Cuvée* bottling, which had previously been known as Cuvée Enchanteleurs. This is the first vintage of the house’s top of the line bottling that has been crafted from beginning to end by Cellar Master Laurent Fresnet. The wine is a fifty-fifty blend of chardonnay and pinot noir, as is the case with their Brut Millésime, but here, only grand cru vineyards are used for the cuvée. The 2005 Cuvée Hemera was aged twelve years *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of five grams per liter. The bouquet is deep, pure and stunning, offering up a very refined blend of pear, apple, a touch of hazelnut, gentle smokiness, a very complex base of soil tones, fresh-baked bread and just a whisper of caraway seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and rock solid at the core, with impeccable focus and grip, very refined *mousse* and outstanding length and grip on the poised, balanced and exquisite finish. This is simply outstanding! 2019-2060. **96.**

2004 Bollinger “R.D.” Brut Millésime (Aÿ)

The 2004 Bollinger “R.D.” is a beautiful bottle of wine, where the slightly leaner aspect of the vintage dovetails beautifully with the richer house style here to create one superb bottle of Champagne. It is a blend of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, with all of the *vins clairs* barrel-fermented and the wine was aged more than five years *sur latte*, all under natural cork. This vintage of R.D. was finished with a low *dosage* of only three grams per liter, but is perfectly balanced and is now starting to really drink beautifully. The bright and complex bouquet offers up scents of white peach, apple, chalky soil tones, sourdough bread, white flowers, orange peel and just a whisper of upper register smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a lovely core, excellent soil signature, refined *mousse* and bright, acids, which add precision to the very long, energetic and complex finish. This is a superb vintage for this bottling, which is delicious today and should age marvelously for at least another couple of decades. 2019-2040+. **94+**.

2000 Lanson Brut Millésime (Reims)

The 2000 Lanson Brut Millésime is drinking very nicely today and is well into its plateau of peak maturity. The bouquet offers up a complex constellation of apple, tart orange, chalky soil tones, sourdough bread and a gentle smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and wide open in personality, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and zesty finish. This still has plenty of life ahead of it, but it is now drinking with generosity and style and I can see no good reason for deferring one’s gratification. 209-2035+. **92**.

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

It has been fifteen months since I last tasted the 2000 vintage of Ployez-Jacquemart’s *Tête de Cuvée*, Liesse d’Harbonville. The wine is made up of a blend of two-thirds chardonnay and one-sixth each of pinot noir and pinot meunier. The *vins clairs* for this prestige cuvée are barrel-fermented and do not go through malo, with the *dosage* here a very low three grams per liter. Laurence Ployez does not rush this wine to market, as it spends fully ten years aging *sur latte* prior to its disgorgement. The wine has continued to blossom beautifully since I last tasted it, offering up a deep and very complex nose of apple, white peach, a lovely touch of hazelnut, gentle smokiness, a fine base of soil, warm bread and a whisper of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with lovely generosity now on the attack, an excellent core of fruit, bright, zesty acids, elegant *mousse* and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is one of my favorite examples of the 2000 vintage, not to mention the best-kept secret in the world of *Tête de Cuvées*! 2019-2045. **95**.

1999 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas François” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1999 Cuvée Nicolas François for several years and the wine is really blossoming now and coming into its apogee of peak drinkability. The first class bouquet wafts from the glass in a lovely blend of white peach, gentle smokiness, chalky minerality, bread dough, a touch of nutskin and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and wide open for inspection, with lovely fruit on the attack, excellent backend mineral drive, pinpoint bubbles and a long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. This is fine juice. 2019-2050. **93**.

1999 Dom Pérignon Brut Millésime- Moët et Chandon (Épernay)

The 1999 Dom Pérignon, but our bottle was a touch blowsy in personality in comparison to the Cuvée Nicolas François from Billecart and seemed to show a bit more of the “warm vintage” character of 1999 in Champagne. The bouquet is complex enough, offering up scents of apple, pear, a touch of *patissière*, a lovely base of soil, lime peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and wide open, with a good attack, but a slightly unstructured backend, with the underlying minerality playing a subservient role to the generous and not all that precise fruit elements. The *mousse* here is still refined and the wine has decent grip, but it seems just a touch soft structurally. This bottle was sourced from retail fairly recently, so there is the possibility that it was stored a tad warm and there may be more precise bottles out there. But, if this bottle is representative, than 1999 is not a great vintage of DP. 2019-2035. **88+?**

1996 Krug Vintage Brut (Reims)

I had not drunk a bottle of the 1996 Krug in several years, as I had deemed the wine still in climbing mode and I am not generally in the business of drinking Krug before its time. But, a friend recently opened a bottle and I was very impressed with how the wine is evolving in the bottle since its release. The bouquet is now starting to show some lovely secondary layering of complexity in its blend of apple, peach, a touch of sweet walnut, *patissière*, a refined base of minerality, caraway seed and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine flavors on the attack echo the nose nicely, with the wine’s full-bodied format sporting excellent depth at the core, still plenty of the vintage’s snappy acidity, great focus and grip and a very, very long and utterly refined finish. Though this remains quite racy structurally, I really like the point it has reached in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity and it is really not a crime to be opening bottles up at this point in its evolution, though it still has room to grow with further bottle age. A great, great vintage of Krug. 2019-2060. **98.**

Clos des Goisses

The Philipponnat family first began bottling Clos des Goisses in 1935, when they had a chance to purchase a significant piece of this beautiful vineyard in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ from another local Champagne house who had fallen on hard times in the economic downturn of the 1930s in France. This was the Bouchet family (who were cousins of the Philipponnats), who had to sell their 2.2 hectare piece of Clos des Goisses at this time and from which they had already been bottling the wine on its own and selling it labeled as *Vin des Goisses* for many years, so this is most likely the Champagne region’s very first single vineyard wine ever commercialized. As I reported in my historical feature on the wine back in the autumn of 2014, the Philipponnat family was able to add other small parcels of Clos des Goisses as opportunity allowed as the years went by, so that today they own the entire 5.5 hectares of the vineyard, with many of the small pieces that they purchased in the early days having never been replanted after phylloxera and being fallow at that time. As I noted in my previous feature on Clos des Goisses, the vineyard is organized into sixteen different *climats*, with the vast majority of these comprising this vineyard’s beautiful, steep and south-facing slope that overlooks the Marne River, with maybe about fifteen percent of its surface area up on the top of the slope in a more of a plateau situation and without the same steep slope as the vast majority of the vineyard. But these plateau parcels are also an important component in the final wine, as Charles Philipponnat notes that “the soils at the top of the plateau are a bit deeper, due to less erosion than the slopes, and this gives wines

with a bit more depth of fruit that can be very important to the blend of the Clos des Goisses cuvée.



Philipponnat's Clos des Goisses is indeed one of Champagne's greatest *Tête de Cuvées*, and really quite a singular wine in it hailing from a single vineyard, almost never going through malolactic fermentation, and aging very long and gracefully in bottle. As I reported on back in 2014, the 1952 vintage of Clos des Goisses, which was the oldest that we went back to in our vertical tasting of the wine at that time, was still at its absolute apogee of peak maturity and drinking with stunning complexity, grace and charm and it seems quite likely that seventy-five to one hundred years longevity is routinely the aging range of a top vintage of Clos des Goisses. The cellar team at Philipponnat, now led by *Chef de Cave* Thierry Garnier, vinifies each distinct parcel of Clos des Goisses separately into a *vin clair*, and then the blending trials begin for what will constitute the new vintage's Clos des Goisses cuvée in the late winter and early spring of the year following the harvest. Today, the *vins clairs* are fermented in a combination of large old wood *foudres* and smaller Burgundy barrels, which range from three to ten years of age, with about a third of the *vins clairs* now fermented in *barriques*. During its time aging *sur latte*, the wine is sealed under cork, rather than crown cap and is always disgorged with the same *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter, no matter the vintage. Clos des Goisses is quite singular in that it is almost always made each year, with the Philipponnat team of the opinion that this unique *terroir* can always produce a wine of character, complexity and interest, even in lesser vintages. For the first

thirty years that Clos des Goisses was produced, under the auspices of long-tenured and legendary *Chef du Cave*, Louis Boland, only two vintages of Clos des Goisses were not produced, the 1944 and the 1954, and it was only after Monsieur Boland's retirement in 1963 that the *maison* decided to bottle Clos des Goisses more along the lines of other *Tête de Cuvées* and only in very top vintages, so that during this period from 1963 to 1988, there were eight years in which Philipponnat did not produce a version of Clos des Goisses. However, from 1988 forwards, it has been produced again in every single vintage, at least in very small quantities.

2010 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2010 vintage of Clos des Goisses will be released in a few more months and it is going to be well worth an effort to find this wine in the market, as it was made in fairly small quantity, but is destined to be a brilliant vintage of Clos des Goisses. In fact, Charles Philipponnat commented as we tasted the 2010 together, "now that I am tasting this wine, I wish I had decided to produce a bit more, but then again, it might not have ended up being of the same quality if we had made more of it!" The 2010 was disgorged in March of 2019 and is truly transcendent of the vintage, as it offers up a beautifully complex nose of apple, pear, hazelnut, chalky minerality, citrus peel and a nice touch of warm bread. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, racy and quite complex, with a great core of fruit, superb mineral drive, refined *mousse* and a very long, poised and vibrant finish. This wine may close down a bit as it gets further out from its disgorgement, but right now, it is characterized by an early expressiveness and complexity that is a bit atypical for young Clos des Goisses and which is absolutely beautiful! 2030-2080+. **95.**

2009 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The very, very fine 2009 Clos des Goisses is more typical of what one expects from this wine in its youth, as the nose is far more reserved out of the blocks than the 2010 version. This wine was disgorged in March of 2018 and the *cépages* of sixty-one percent pinot noir and thirty-nine percent chardonnay (a two-thirds pinot to one-third chardonnay blend is the goal here most years). The 2009 is nicely primary on the nose, offering up scents of pear, lovely red fruit tones, macadamia nut, a lovely base of soil, gentle smokiness and incipient notes of white flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a rock solid core, lovely focus and grip, refined bubbles and outstanding length on the balanced and very promising finish. The palate seems a touch more open than the nose suggests and this wine will probably come forward fairly early for a Clos des Goisses, but will age long and beautifully on its exquisite balance. There is nothing blowsy about this racy 2009! 2025-2075. **94.**

2008 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2008 Clos des Goisses is one of the very few where the chardonnay in the blend is in ascendancy over the pinot noir, as in this vintage the *cépages* is fifty-five percent chardonnay and forty-five percent pinot noir. The only other vintage where I can think of this blend being found in Clos des Goisses is in the magical 1964, which may portend greatness for the beautiful 2008 version. The wine was disgorged in May of 2017 and today is showing beautifully, albeit in its youthful guise, wafting from the glass in a blend of apple, pear, a touch of almond, beautiful minerality, a touch of citrus peel and hints of the musky floral tones to come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is crisp, pure and full, with a fairly closed down and youthful personality today, a great core of fruit, precise, seamless balance, very elegant *mousse*, great length and grip and simply stunning potential for a decade down the road. This will be a

legendary vintage of Clos des Goisses in the fullness of time, but it is still a puppy and needs more bottle age! 2028-2085. **95+**.

2006 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

Of the younger vintages of Clos des Goisses still out on the market, the 2006 is the one I would reach for to drink today, as it has aged in a fairly brisk manner for this bottling and today is flat out delicious at the present time, albeit, still with many decades of potential life ahead of it. The *cépages* of the 2006 is sixty-five percent pinot noir and thirty-five percent chardonnay and it was disgorged in May of 2015. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of apple, hazelnut, a lovely base of the vineyard's soil, smoky overtones, fresh-baked bread and incipient notes of musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, open and classy, with fine depth in the core, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a long, elegant and complex finish. I really like the bounce and backend length here. 2019-2055. **93**.

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

The 2000 vintage of Clos des Goisses is now entering its plateau of peak maturity and is wide open on both the nose and palate, but I have a feeling that a few more years in the cellar will allow even a bit more refinement to its palate impression, which still shows a bit of youthful angularity today. The bouquet is superb, jumping from the glass in a quite mineral blend of peach, apple, smoky overtones, complex minerality, a touch of lavender and the first signs of the macadamia nuttiness to come with more aging. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nicely open on the attack, with a fine core and soil signature, bright acids, elegant *mousse* and fine length and grip on the still gently youthful backend. I have no problem drinking this wine today, but it may be even a shade better with a bit more patience. This bottle was disgorged in May of 2015, so this is a later disgorgement than the original release. 2019-2045. **94**.

1996 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

As I noted back in my feature on Clos des Goisses back in the autumn of 2014, the 1996 vintage here is a bit atypical, as its *cépages* is a fifty-fifty split of chardonnay and pinot noir, rather than the more customary two-thirds pinot. The wine has started to really hit its plateau of peak maturity since I last drank it four and a half years ago, as the musky floral tones and beautiful nuttiness of mature Clos des Goisses are really starting to be felt in the beautiful bouquet of pear, white peach, macadamia nut, brioche, chalky soil tones, a touch of citrus blossoms to go along with the more stridently musky floral overtones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and shows off beautiful, rock solid mid-palate depth, with lovely *mousse*, racy acids and laser-like focus on the very long and very complex finish. Though this is a bit of an outlier in the pantheon of Clos des Goisses, with its half chardonnay blend, it is one of my favorite vintages of this great wine and one of the best examples of the vintage, as there is no shortage of fruit here to stand up to the vintage's snappy acidity. A great, great wine that is getting awfully good to drink, though still in climbing mode and has not yet reached its apex. This bottle was disgorged in June of 2010. 2019-2060. **96+**.

1993 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 1993 Clos des Goisses was one of the smallest production vintages of this wine, as Philipponnat only produced three thousand bottles in total. This is a recently disgorged example, having been removed from its fine lees in July of 2018. The wine was showing beautifully at our tasting, offering up a complex and fairly unique bouquet for this bottling, with scents of apple, lemon zest, lovely minerality, spices meats, a touch of menthol, gentle smokiness and a nutty topnote wafting from the glass with a bit of air. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and quite complex, with lovely balance, fine focus and grip, refined *mousse* and good, but not great

length on the classy finish. This is a good example of how Clos des Goisses can produce something very, very interesting, even in lesser vintages! 2019-2040. **92.**

1989 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime served from magnum (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

This is a fairly recent disgorgement of the 1989 in magnum, having been separated from its fine lees in September of 2015. I had drunk another magnum of this wine back at the time of my historical feature on the wine back in the fall of 2014, with that magnum having been disgorged in September of 2013, so this is essentially the same wine with two years more time on the yeasts. It is a brilliant vintage of Clos des Goisses and truly stunning in this relatively recent disgorgement, with the bouquet soaring from the glass in a classic blend of pear, apple, lovely minerality, *patissière*, almond, and a potpourri of gently musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully synthesizes ripe and pure fruit with a blade of limestone minerality, with excellent cut and grip, impeccable *mousse* and a very long, very pure and *à point* finish. Pure magic! 2019-2055+. **96.**

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

The 1982 vintage of Clos des Goisses is one of my favorite “older vintages” of the wine for current drinking. This particular bottle was disgorged in September of 2016 and now delivers a marvelous aromatic constellation of peach, pear, macadamia nut, musky floral tones, a fine base of chalky soil elements and an exotic topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and at its absolute summit of evolution, with a lovely core, excellent acids and grip, refined *mousse* and a long, wide open and extremely refined finish. I guess around the thirty-five to forty year range is where I really like to drink my Clos des Goisses! 2019-2050. **95.**

1976 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 1976 Clos des Goisses is also still cruising along marvelously in its advancing years and shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. This too is a later disgorgement, as this was removed from its fine lees in June of 2010. The last time I tasted this vintage of Clos des Goisses four and a half years ago in magnum, but the regular-sized bottles are also still fresh and *à point*. The complex bouquet wafts from the glass in a mix of peach, pear, hazelnuts, a fine base of soil, a touch of bee pollen and those signature, mature Clos des Goisses musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and beautifully complex, with plenty of vibrancy and mid-palate depth, lovely remaining bubbles and a long, classy and bouncy finish. This is still lovely and almost as good in bottle at age forty-three as it was in magnum a few years back. 2019-2040. **94.**

Vintage Dated Brut and Extra Brut Rosé

2014 Marguet Père et Fils “Ambonnay” Rosé Brut Nature Millésime (Ambonnay)

Benoît Marguet makes a series of “village-named” bottlings, with some made from purchased fruit (such as his Mesnil cuvée) and others from his own, estate vineyards, as is the case with this brilliant bottle of vintage Rosé. The wine is comprised of a *cépages* of eighty-one percent chardonnay and nineteen percent pinot noir and was disgorged in March of 2019. The wine is simply stunning on the nose, soaring from the glass in a mix of melon, white cherries, tangerine, chalky soil tones, a touch of caraway seed, dried flowers and just a hint of the smokiness that will come with further bottle age. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and shows off gorgeous mid-palate depth, with seamless balance, pinpoint bubbles and stunning length and grip on the complex and utterly refined finish. This is the best vintage-dated Rosé I have tasted from Monsieur Marguet since the exquisite 2009 version! Do not miss it! 2019-2050. **95.**

2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé Millésime (Épernay)

With some exercise of self-control, I managed to let two and a half years elapse between bottles of the 2006 Pol Roger Brut Rosé, which is drinking so well that I often wander over in the direction of the case in my cellar whenever I am down there looking for a bottle of bubbly. But, somehow I have managed to leave what remains of the box alone for thirty months and the wine has reached its apogee during the time between bottles. As I have noted in the past, this is sixty-five percent pinot noir (fifteen percent of this is still red wine) and thirty-five percent chardonnay. The nose is now wide open and absolutely beautiful, wafting from the glass in a complex mix of white cherries, tangerine, a touch of rhubarb, a superb base of chalky soil tones, rye bread and a topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and displays excellent mid-palate depth, with refined *mousse*, bright acids and outstanding focus and grip on the long and complex finish. This is stellar juice. 2019-2040+. **94.**

Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé”

In my relatively recent feature on Clos des Goisses back in the fall of 2014, I did not cover the Juste Rosé bottling, as this was not represented in either of the vertical tastings of Clos des Goisses that formed the foundation for that article. In fact, the Juste Rosé is a fairly recent addition to the Philipponnat portfolio of cuvées, as Charles Philipponnat chose to create this bottling only when he arrived at the estate as CEO back in 1999. Consequently, there had never been a Clos des Goisses Rosé produced prior to the first vintage of 1999 and, in historical terms, it is still very early days for this marvelous Rosé bottling. As Charles Philipponnat commented at our recent tasting, “when I arrived here, it seemed clear that a Clos des Goisses Rosé was a missing link in our range of wines and it was logical to start to produce one, so I set out to do this with my very first vintage here.” The wine is a beautiful example of this inimitable *terroir*, offering up a surprisingly delicately pale salmon color for a Rosé bottling, without a whole lot more depth of color than the lightest bottlings of Rosé such as Krug’s and Louis Roederer’s Cristal Rosé. Charles has tweaked his approach to the Juste Rosé over the years, as the first few vintages were made with the addition of a small percentage of still red pinot noir from the Clos des Goisses vineyard, but from the 2003 vintage forwards, he has shifted gears a bit and now adds the color to this bottling by doing a *saignée* of a barrel of pinot noir and using this unfermented rosé *vin clair* for the blend, rather than adding the fully fermented still red wine to the Juste Rosé cuvée. At our vertical tasting, the change to using the *saignée* juice, rather than the fermented pinot noir seems to have added even a bit more delicacy and refinement to the more recent vintages of this beautiful bottling.

The Juste Rosé bottling of Clos des Goisses is given a bit longer time in the cellars aging *sur latte*, prior to disgorgement than the regular bottling of Clos des Goisses, so it is typically two vintages behind in release dates in this regard. Like the non- Rosé bottling of Clos des Goisses, it is typically a non-malo wine and is finished each year with the same *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter, as Charles Philipponnat’s philosophy for both bottlings of Clos des Goisses is to keep the *dosage* consistent from vintage to vintage and allow more of each vintage’s character to shape the cuvée, as this way the *dosage* becomes a constant, rather than a variable from year to year. The *vins clairs* for what will become Juste Rosé is typically raised in a combination of older Burgundy barrels and even older *foudres*, with the amount of barrel-fermented juice ranging from thirty to forty percent, depending on the style of the vintage. Since the inaugural vintage of 1999 for the Juste Rosé, the pinot noir that is to be used for making the Rosé color in

the bottling (the first three vintages as still red wine, and subsequently, the barrels from which the *saignée* juice is taken to color the bottling) has originated in the *lieu à dit* of Les Valofroy, which is the westernmost top of the Clos des Goisses hillside vineyard and where there is a bit more clay over the substrata of limestone, as this is a slightly plateaued area and the slope is less in this part of the vineyard. Typically, ten to twelve percent of each year's Juste Rosé blend will be comprised now of *saignée* juice from casks of pinot noir from this subsection of the vineyard.



I asked Charles Philipponnat if there were any differences in their preparation for the Just Rosé and the regular bottling of Clos des Goisses in the immediate aftermath of the harvest. He responded, “the selection process is the same as for the white Clos des Goisses: we make all the parcels, and then select and use the same best wines according to the vintage for both versions, although the proportions in the final blend may differ.” As he noted, when it comes to the chardonnay component that is to be included in the Juste Rosé, a different criteria may be used for the selected blend of the *vins clairs*, “often with a little more chardonnay than in the white (Clos des Goisses) counterpart, for elegance, while the blend remains dominated by a majority of pinot noir” due to the inclusion eventually of the *saignée* pinot noir as well in the cuvée. Once the respective blends are decided upon for the regular Clos des Goisses and the Juste Rosé, the *vins clairs* are handled the same, as Charles notes that “we always bottle in May or June following the harvest” for the two versions of Clos des Goisses, before their secondary fermentations and aging *sur latte*. For the first couple of vintages of Juste Rosé, it was aged for a

shorter period of time than the regular Clos des Goisses prior to disgorgement, as it was a new cuvée for the *maison* and there were concerns that it might age faster than the regular bottling. However, as Charles Philipponnat observes, “our experience now being the opposite, we have let it slip to being one to two years older than the white, thus increasing the contact time with the lees” and “it should now stay that way” for the Juste Rosé on into the future. As the regular bottling of Clos des Goisses is now typically aged for eight years on its fine lees prior to disgorgement, this means that the Juste Rosé is now destined for ten years aging *sur latte*.

As the notes below will attest, the Juste Rosé is a marvellous new addition to the pantheon of Champagne *Têtes de Cuvées* and probably has to be ranked right up there as the most exciting new bottling to be crafted at any of the *Grandes Marques* alongside Krug’s Clos d’Ambonnay. While it is an extremely elegant and refined example of Rosé Champagne, it is also very much a Clos des Goisses, revelling in the signature of profound limestone minerality that defines this great *terroir* and relying beautifully on pinot noir as the primary component in the blend to give the wine properly broad shoulders and tremendous potential for longevity in the bottle. Of the earliest releases, the 2002 Juste Rosé is the legend of the first run of vintages of this bottling, but the 2008 that is soon to be shipped out from the cellars in Mareuil will give the 2002 a run for its money and fully underscores that as stunning as the early vintages of Juste Rosé have been, the cuvée is really now starting to hit its stride, as Charles Philipponnat, Cellar Master Thierry Garnier, and all the technical team at Champagne Philipponnat are only just into their second decade of crafting Juste Rosé and I have to believe that there are some young vintages of this wine now resting comfortably *sur latte* in the cellars here that are going to be every bit as magical as the 2002 and 2008 vintages, which are to date, the finest examples of Juste Rosé that I have yet tasted. However, this wine is every bit as classic Clos des Goisses and that means that every year produces something interesting and special, and each vintage is a truly exceptional wine. So, for example, though I might rank the 2008 and 2002 as my absolute favourites in terms of ultimate potential, it is the 2006 vintage of the recent releases that I would reach for now for current drinking, as it is at a great stage in its evolution today.

2008 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2008 vintage of Clos des Goisses Juste Rosé is not yet released, but will be in the coming months. It was disgorged in March of 2019 and is a blend this year of fifty-two percent pinot noir and forty-eight percent chardonnay, so it mirrors the higher percentage of chardonnay in the blend this year that is also found in the non- Rosé Clos des Goisses 2008. The wine is young, properly reserved and absolutely stunning in its potential, offering up a precise and complex nose of tangerine, apple, chalky minerality, *patissière*, spring flowers and a nice touch of orange blossom as well in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, elegant in profile and tightly-knit today, with a lovely core, great focus and grip, supremely refined *mousse* and lovely length and grip on the perfectly balanced and nascently complex finish. This is a legend in the making. 2028-2075. 96+.

2007 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2007 vintage of Juste Rosé is another vintage of this bottling with a bit more chardonnay in the blend than one might expect, as the *cépages* for this year is fifty-five percent pinot noir and forty-five percent chardonnay. This is the current release of Juste Rosé on the market and the wine is simply outstanding, offering up a blossoming bouquet of orange, white cherries, smoke, chalky soil tones, a lovely touch of pinot spice tones and a topnote of dried

flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and shows off lovely depth in the mid-palate, with impeccable balance, elegant *mousse*, plenty of complexity and a long, complete and very classy finish. This is not quite as seamlessly balanced as the 2008 version and shows just a whisper of backend tannin that promises a slow, outstanding evolutionary arc. This vintage was disgorged in November of 2017. 2019-2050. **94.**

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

The 2006 vintage has produced utterly classical examples of both Clos des Goisses and Juste Rosé, with the latter having been crafted from a *cépages* of sixty-three percent pinot noir and thirty-seven percent chardonnay. As always, the wine was finished with a *dosage* of 4.5 grams per liter and disgorged in June of 2016. Today the wine is starting to entre its plateau of peak maturity, where it promises to stay for many decades to come. The nose is a refined constellation of clementine, white cherries, a touch of gentle nuttiness, chalky soil tones, wheat toast, gently musky floral tones and a topnote of discreet smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and quite wide open and generous today, with bright, snappy acids, outstanding focus and grip, a lovely core, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, beautifully balanced and complex finish. This is starting to really drink with great beauty. 2019-2050. **95.**

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

The 2005 vintage of Juste Rosé is also closer to the typical Clos des Goisses mix of two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay, as its *cépages* is sixty-four percent pinot and thirty-six percent chardonnay. The wine was aged *sur latte* for nine years prior to its disgorgement in May of 2015 and finished with its customary 4.5 grams per liter *dosage*. The wine is a bit more spicy in aromatic profile than either the 2006 or 2007, wafting from the glass in a fine mix of white cherries, tangerine, lovely spice tones, chalky soil, a hint of orange peel, gentle smokiness and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with refined *mousse*, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. My only, very minor complaint with the 2005 Juste Rosé is that it is just a touch angular in terms of balance in comparison to the utterly suave 2006 version. But, it is a very minor blemish on a very lovely wine. 2019-2040. **92.**

2002 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2002 vintage of Juste Rosé is utterly brilliant and seems clearly destined to be the greatest vintage produced to date of this beautiful wine, with the 2008 poised to give it a run for its money a couple of decades down the road. This particular bottle of 2002 Just Rosé was disgorged in September 2015, so this example saw a bit longer time on its fine lees than the original disgorgement. The *cépages* in 2002 was seventy percent pinot noir and thirty percent chardonnay. The bouquet is pure, refined and utterly precise, offering up a youthful blend of peach, tangerine, gentle smokiness, white flowers, a gorgeous base of chalky soil tones, *patissière* and a topnote of orange blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a great girdle of acidity, a rock solid core of fruit, elegant *mousse* and stunning length and grip on the complex and utterly seamless finish. The 2002 was the last vintage of Juste Rosé to be made with the addition of a bit of still pinot noir, rather than *saignée rosé* juice, which may give this whisper more structure for the long haul than the equally magical 2008 version, but time will tell on that front. Just a brilliant, brilliant young wine. 2025-2075+. **97.**

2000 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The 2000 vintage of Juste Rosé is drinking beautifully at age nineteen and seems to be getting close to entering fully into its plateau of peak maturity. The blend this year was sixty-nine percent pinot noir and thirty-one percent chardonnay. The bouquet is pure and expressive,

wafting from the glass in a blend of tangerine, white cherries, orange peel, musky floral tones, chalk and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, complex and nicely structured, with almost a hint of backend tannin still showing. The wine has an excellent core, fine cut and grip, pinpoint bubbles and a very long, complex and beautifully balanced finish. The addition of still red wine here, rather than *saignée* juice for color, seems to show a bit in a rather attractive manner that argues strongly for this wine to be served with the main course at dinner! Fine, fine juice that I would not hesitate to give just a few more years in the cellar to let that touch of tannin on the backend fall away. This bottle was disgorged in September of 2015, so this is a later disgorgement than the original release, which was probably first disgorged in the spring of 2011. 2022-2065+. **94+**.

1999 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses “Juste Rosé” Brut Millésime (Mareuil-sur-Aÿ)

The very first vintage of Juste Rosé is the most exotic of this vertical that we tasted, which I attribute as much to its being the inaugural release of this wine, rather than the character of the 1999 vintage. This bottle is from the original disgorgement in October of 2006, and as you can see, the cellar team at Philipponnat has extended the amount of time this cuvée spends aging *sur latte* as the years have gone by and new vintages have been crafted. The *cépages* of the 1999 is two-thirds pinot noir and one-third chardonnay. The bouquet of the 1999 offers up a beautifully complex mélange of peach, passion fruit, smoke, lovely spice tones, *patissière*, chalky soil, macadamia nuts and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with a fine core of fruit, lovely acidity and structure, refined *mousse* and a long, balanced and classy finish. This is delicious and now into its apogee of peak maturity, but still with many, many years of life ahead of it. 2019-2045. **93**.

NEW RELEASES FROM ALSACE ICONS MAISON TRIMBACH AND DOMAINE WEINBACH



As readers may recall from last autumn, when I was putting together my report on new releases and older vintages from the beautiful region of Alsace, the current bottlings from both Maison Trimbach and Domaine Weinbach were not available for inclusion in the feature. I had made a note to circle back to taste the current releases from both of these iconic estates in the spring. Happily, I had much better timing this past May and am able to cover the wines from both of these excellent producers in this new issue. The only minor obstacle this time around was Maison Trimbach's new US importer did not have any bottles of the 2013 Clos Ste. Hune to send along (which hurt a bit, given how fond I have been of Clos Ste. Hune for almost all of my adult life!), but happily, a call to Ribeauvillé to the estate to see if anything could be arranged proved quite effective. I telephoned at about 5:30 in the afternoon on a Tuesday in May and asked as politely as I could in my somewhat limited French if I might leave a message for Monsieur Jean Trimbach, only to find, after a bit of chuckling on the other end, that Jean had picked up the phone himself, as almost everyone else had left for the evening! I have known Jean Trimbach since the late 1980s and he quickly came up with a very creative solution to the lack of sample bottles of the 2013 Clos Ste. Hune in the inventory here in New York, as a magnum of this great wine showed up at my door a few days later! If there was ever a lesson that a direct

phone call can be more effective than emailing or texting in this day and age, that magnum would certainly be it!

I waited until I had a sufficient group of friends together before opening the magnum of the 2013 Clos Ste. Hune, as a bottle that large of a wine that good must, by definition, be shared with like-minded souls. Consequently, it ended up being served as a proper “taste break” during the Châteaux Magdelaine and Bélair-Monange tasting reported on elsewhere in this issue and a photo of the mag can be seen gracing the table alongside all of those vintages of those two St. Émilions. All in attendance at the St. Émilion tasting warmly raised a glass to the generosity of Monsieur Trimbach on that night, and then joined me in concluding the 2013 vintage is one of the finest vintages to be released of this great Riesling bottling in the last twenty years! This spring also saw the arrival of the new releases from Domaine Weinbach, which has historically been another of my favorite producers in the region, and I was very happy when their US importer arranged for the complete lineup to be sent along as samples for this short article. These turned out to be from the 2017 vintage. This was a frost-damaged vintage in Alsace, as was the case in other regions of France, with freezing temperatures hitting certain vineyards in the region on the evenings of April 19, 20 and 21 in 2017. Damage tended to be limited mostly to the lower parts of slopes, where the cooler night air would settle, but as spring here had been precocious, the vines were already fairly well-developed and where the frosts hit, the damage was fairly extensive. The mid-summer period was rainy at times in 2017, but August was warm, sunny and dry and the early budbreak led to picking being started on one of the earliest dates in history, with the first grapes starting to be brought in on the 21st of August from some of the warmer vineyards in Alsace. However, the weather was ideal by this time, with the evenings cooler, and so acids were often retained nicely, despite fairly high sugars, and it was a vintage where it was possible to make high quality late harvest wines in this vintage (though I have not yet tried any).

As is typically the case with Maison Trimbach, the current releases sent to me only included one wine from the 2017 vintage, their Pinot Blanc, as the Trimbach family likes to hold their wines back a bit prior to release and give them a bit of aging in the bottle prior to letting them out into the market. The beauty of the family’s approach to release dates is that the current wines in the market include the 2012 vintage for their best Gewurztraminer bottling, the “Cuvée des Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre”, the 2015 vintage for one of their relatively new Grand Cru bottlings of Riesling from the superb Schlossberg vineyard, 2011 for their Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile” and, as I already mentioned, 2013 for the Clos Ste. Hune. It was a fine range of wines for the most part (the 2011 Cuvée Frédéric Émile was a bit too ripe for my personal tastes, but perhaps that was the nature of the vintage for these parcels) and there were some absolutely stellar wines on display. One of the impressions that I have come away with from these last couple of reports on Alsace wines is that the one grape variety that seems to really be struggling with climate change in the region- at least to my palate- is Pinot Gris, as many of the examples I tasted between these two reports were simply too high in sugar accumulation in our torrid era. This presents the *vigneron* with the difficult choice of either leaving plenty of residual sugar in the finished wine or allowing the alcohol levels to get rather heady. Neither option is ideal in my opinion, and it really stood out in this group of samples that this varietal is not as interesting in the age of global warming as either Riesling or Gewurztraminer (Pinot Gris’ traditional challengers to the moniker of Alsace’s finest varietal), and I really have a hard time saying these days that I do not prefer good examples of Muscat, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Auxerrois to Pinot Gris

in this age of climactic change. I am not sure what the solution might be, as perhaps there is no answer, but maybe the INAO might want to explore the possibility of cropping Pinot Gris at higher levels, to allow slower sugar accumulation in the more expanded number of bunches on the vine? In any event, the following notes represent the current releases from two of Alsace's greatest producers and there are some truly superb wines out in the market right now from each of these iconic estates.

Pinot Noir

2016 Pinot Noir “Réserve”- Maison Trimbach

The 2016 Pinot Noir “Réserve” from Maison Trimbach is one of the ripest examples of this varietal that I can recall tasting from the estate, as it comes in fully at thirteen percent alcohol this year. The wine is nicely deep in color and offers up a youthful bouquet of red and black cherries, woodsmoke, bitter chocolate, a good base of soil and a touch of fresh herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core of fruit, a bit of firm tannin and a long, youthful and still slightly weedy, adolescent finish. This has fine focus and grip and should really blossom quite nicely with a bit of bottle age. 2022-2050. **87+.**

2016 Pinot Noir “S” - Domaine Weinbach

The 2016 Pinot Noir “S” bottling from Domaine Weinbach is nicely ripe for this varietal in Alsace, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. The pinot vines for this bottling are planted in the family's *monopole* vineyard of the Clos des Capucins. The nose of the 2016 offers up a nascently complex blend of black cherries, a touch of red currant, lovely spice tones, a touch of orange zest, woodsmoke, soil, a dollop of fresh herb tones and a well done framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and moderately tannic, with solid depth at the core, good soil signature and a long, still quite youthful and well-balanced finish. This needs some time in the cellar to soften up its backend tannins, but it is quite impressive and will be a good bottle when it is ready to go. 2023-2050+. **89.**

Pinot Blanc and Sylvaner

2017 Pinot Blanc- Maison Trimbach (screwcap)

Despite being sealed under a screwcap, the 2017 Trimbach Pinot Blanc shows no signs of imminent reduction issues and is really quite a tasty vintage of this consistently tasty, workhorse example of pinot blanc. The bouquet offers up a vibrant mix of apple, lemon, a good base of soil, dried flowers and just a dollop of citrus zest in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, bright and quite solid at the core, with fine focus and grip, lovely acids and a long, bouncy finish. This is good juice, but I wish it was still bottled under natural cork. 2019-2025. **89.**

2017 Pinot Blanc- Domaine Weinbach

Domaine Weinbach's 2017 Pinot Blanc is composed of a blend of seventy percent Pinot Auxerrois and thirty percent Pinot Blanc. The vines lie in the Clos des Capucins vineyard (the oldest parcels) and in the Cuvée Laurence vineyard. The wine is fermented and aged in old oak *foudres*. The 2017 version offers up a lovely nose of peach, apple, a touch of straw, white flowers and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, bright and complex, with a touch of Auxerrois' muskiness, fine focus and grip and a long, bouncy finish. A very fine example. 2019-2029. **89.**

2017 Sylvaner- Domaine Weinbach

The 2017 Sylvaner from Domaine Weinbach is a lovely wine, coupling good ripeness of fruit with a fine foundation of underlying minerality. The bouquet offers up a bright and youthful bouquet of apple, a touch of pit fruit, lemongrass, wet stone minerality and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a fine core, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the fairly complex finish. This is very good Sylvaner. 2019-2030. **88.**

Muscat and Pinot Gris

2017 Muscat- Domaine Weinbach

The Muscat bottling from Domaine Weinbach hails entirely from their lovely *monopole* vineyard of the Clos des Capucins. The 2017 comes in at thirteen percent octane and is fermented completely dry. It delivers a very expressive aromatic constellation of pear, passion fruit, rosewater, a potpourri of musky floral tones and a lovely undertow of minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely ripe on the attack, with a good core, sound acids and lovely focus and grip on the long and perfumed finish. This is a fairly broad-shouldered example of Muscat on the palate, but with good balance and impressive length. 2019-2030. **89.**

2017 Pinot Gris “Cuvée Laurence”- Domaine Weinbach

Domaine Weinbach’s 2017 Pinot Gris “Cuvée Laurence” is a pretty ripe customer, coming in at a full 14.5 percent alcohol in this vintage. The wine offers up a ripe and gently musky bouquet of apple, pineapple, acacia blossom, a nice touch of soil and a bit of upper register nuttiness. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and nicely plush at the core, with fairly moderate acids, good focus and grip and a long, complex and well-balanced finish. Despite its generous octane, the wine stays quite cool on the backend and shows no signs of heat, but it is a tad on the soft side and probably will be most tasty over the near-term. 2019-2024+? **89.**

2017 Pinot Gris “Cuvée Sainte Catherine”- Domaine Weinbach

The 2017 Pinot Gris “Cuvée Sainte Catherine” from Domaine Weinbach is one of the ripest wines in their lineup of current releases, tipping the scales at a hefty 14.5 percent octane this year. The bottling is made from a blend of old vines in the Clos des Capucins, a parcel of pinot gris planted on the lower section of the Schlossberg and some younger vines in the grand cru of Marckrain. Despite its substantial ripeness, the wine offers up lovely freshness on the nose, wafting from the glass in a mix of peach, apple, wheat chaff, orange blossoms, a good base of soil tones and a wisp of smokiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and full-bodied, with a lovely core, surprisingly fine balance for its octane, good focus and grip and a long, succulent and complex finish. Given its alcohol level, I would be surprised to see this wine make old bones, but for drinking over the next five or six years, there is a lot of pleasure to be had here. 2019-2025+? **89.**

Gewurztraminer

2017 Gewurztraminer “Cuvée Laurence”- Domaine Weinbach

The 2017 Gewurztraminer “Cuvée Laurence” from Domaine Weinbach is produced from a parcel of vines in the Altenbourg vineyard, which lies just below the grand cru of Furstentum. This is a steep and chalky soil, with lots of small stones. The 2017 Cuvée Laurence comes in listed at 13.5 percent alcohol, but is actually a tad lower at 13.39 percent. It offers up a beautiful precise and expressive bouquet of lychee nut, rosewater, a touch of spiced meats, chalky soil

tones and a beautifully floral upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and carries a bit of residual sweetness on the attack, with a lovely core of fruit, good minerality, sound framing acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. I prefer this wine retaining a bit of residual sweetness and keeping the alcohol level down, rather than having been fermented to total dryness and getting a bit heady in octane. This is a very pretty bottle of Gewurztraminer. 2019-2030+. **91.**

2017 Gewurztraminer “Cuvée Théo”- Domaine Weinbach

The Gewurztraminer “Cuvée Théo” from Domaine Weinbach hails from a special plot in the Clos des Capucins which is planted on sandy soil, littered with granitic pebbles. This plot ripens earlier than much of the rest of the vintage and the 2017 version comes in at fourteen percent alcohol. The wine offers up a beautiful aromatic constellation of lychee nut, peach, rosewater, a dollop of soil and a potpourri of musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with more soil signature on the palate than the nose suggests, a fine core, sound, gentle acidity and lovely length and grip on the complex and wide open finish. There is not a lot in reserve here and the wine will drink best in its youth, but it has charm and plenty of personality out of the blocks. 2019-2025. **89.**



2016 Gewurztraminer- Maison Trimbach

The 2016 Gewurztraminer from Maison Trimbach is a lovely example of this varietal in today's age of global warming. The wine has been fermented quite dry, but consequently comes

in at fourteen percent octane, but still retains good precision and complexity. The classic nose jumps from the glass in a blend of lychee nut, apple, rosewater, a touch of spiced meats, lovely minerality and plenty of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and muscular in personality, with a fine core of fruit, good acids and a long, focused and ripe finish. This carries its alcohol quite well, but at fourteen percent, it will probably best drunk in its relative youth. 2019-2027+? **89.**

2012 Gewurztraminer “Cuvée des Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre”- Maison Trimbach

The 2012 Seigneurs de Ribeaupierre from Maison Trimbach is a lovely bottle of Gewurztraminer that is reaching its apogee at age seven and really drinking well. This is a ripe wine, coming in at fourteen percent, but vinified completely dry and now offering up a nice touch of secondary layers of complexity in its nose of pineapple, spiced meats, rosewater, a good base of wet stone minerality and a hint of honeycomb in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with solid framing acids, good focus and grip and a long, well-balanced and wide open finish. There is probably not enough acidity to carry this wine another decade in bottle, but it is so well-balanced that it may well surprise us and last longer than I anticipate. That said, I would be inclined to drink it up over the next five or six years, while it is still at the peak of its powers, as it is delicious today. 2019-2025+? **92.**

Riesling

2017 Riesling “Cuvée Théo”- Domaine Weinbach

The Cuvée Théo bottling of Riesling from Domaine Weinbach hails from the estate’s *monopole* vintage of the Clos des Capucins in Kayserberg. Like all of the Weinbach vineyards, the Clos des Capucins is farmed biodynamically today and the Cuvée Théo is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in old *fuders*. The 2017 version is an excellent young wine, offering up a very promising nose of grapefruit, tart orange, a complex base of soil tones, citrus peel and a touch of musky floral tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is broad-shouldered, crisp, full-bodied and focused, with excellent mid-palate depth, snappy acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. There is just a whisper of backend residual sweetness here, which I am sure was considered preferable to allowing the alcohol to climb above its listed thirteen percent octane. Good juice. 2019-2030+. **90.**

2017 Riesling “Schlossberg” Grand Cru- Domaine Weinbach

The 2017 Riesling “Schlossberg” from Domaine Weinbach is fairly ripe, coming in listed at 13.5 percent octane in this vintage, but it is fresh, vibrant and shows no signs of pushing the envelope in any manner. The bouquet offers up a deep and complex blend of apple, grapefruit, petrol, stony minerality, a bit of orange peel and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good soil signature, bright, zesty acids and a long, nascently complex, bone dry and quite classy finish. This is a lovely example of this superb *terroir*. 2019-2040+. **92+.**

2017 Riesling “Schlossberg” Cuvée Sainte Catherine Grand Cru- Domaine Weinbach

Domaine Weinbach’s Cuvée Sainte Catherine bottling of the Schlossberg hails from the top, stonier section of the vineyard (as is the case with their straight Schlossberg bottling as well). The 2017 Cuvée Sainte Catherine is a beautiful bottle of young Alsace Riesling, offering up a deep and very refined bouquet of apple, tart orange, a touch of lavender, lemongrass, complex stony soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully structured, with excellent mid-palate depth, lovely, nascent complexity, snappy acids and excellent mineral drive on the long and very, very promising finish. This is listed at

13.5 percent, but is nicely tensile out of the blocks and seems even a bit lower than this octane level. It is a beautiful wine in the making. 2022-2050. **94.**

2015 Riesling “Schlossberg” Grand Cru- Maison Trimbach

The Trimbach family bought two hectares of vines in the grand cru of Schlossberg in 2012 and released their first bottling of this wine in the 2014 vintage. The second vintage of 2015 is a beautiful wine, coming in at a ripe 13.5 percent octane, but offering up the classic Trimbach mineral drive and seamless structure for long-term cellaring. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a complex blend of tangerine, grapefruit, a touch of guava, petrol, a complex base of granitic minerality, orange peel, dried flowers and a bit of iris blossom in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with excellent transparency and grip, bright, snappy acids and lovely focus on the long, complex and well-balanced finish. This is a fairly powerful Riesling by the Trimbachs’ standards, but 2015 was a very hot summer in Europe, and the wine has retained the *maison’s* sense of refinement and understated beauty in the face of the heat of the growing season of 2015. Fine juice. 2019-2040. **93.**



2013 Riesling “Clos Ste. Hune”- Maison Trimbach (served from magnum)

The 2013 vintage of Clos Ste. Hune is one of the finest young vintages of this great wine that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. As the US importer was out of sample bottles of this wine, Jean Trimbach very kindly intervened and arranged for a sample magnum to be sent,

which made some of my friends very happy when I shared it with them! The wine is nicely cool in profile in 2013, coming in at 12.5 percent octane and offering up beautiful precision in its youthful bouquet of pink grapefruit, tart orange, a touch of petrol, a beautiful base of limestone minerality, discreet floral tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very, very deep at the core, with beautiful transparency and lift, snappy acids and great length and grip on the focused and complex finish. A great, classic vintage of Clos Ste. Hune. 2024-2080. **96.**

2011 Riesling “Cuvée Frédéric Émile”- Maison Trimbach

The 2011 Cuvée Frédéric Émile is a pretty ripe wine by the traditional standards of this bottling, as it comes in at a full fourteen percent alcohol. The bouquet here shows its ripeness, offering up a gently tropical and fairly powerful blend of pineapple, petrol, salty minerality, tart orange, dried flowers, a hint of lemongrass and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and plenty ripe, with a rock solid core, bright acids and a long, complex and gently warm finish. This is not bad for its high alcohol, but it will need drinking early on, as in my experience, I have never seen a vintage of Cuvée Frédéric Émile at this octane level age long and gracefully. That said, the inherent breed of this cuvée is still evident in the 2011, despite its level of ripeness. 2019-2025+? **88.**

ROUND TWO OF THE 2017 BEAUJOLAIS AND A FINE HANDFUL OF OLDER VINTAGES



This is my second report primarily focused on the 2017 Beaujolais vintage, but as there are still plenty of excellent 2016s in the market as well, the previous vintage has more than its share of representatives in the tastings notes that follow. I also covered these two vintages a couple of issues ago, but as there are plenty more notes in this report, it seemed that it would make sense to reprise the vintage summations of 2016 and 2017 in the region in this article as well, rather than asking subscribers to go back to the feature in Issue 79 to get the details on the two growing seasons. As both years were full of climactic challenges for *vignerons* in the region (each year also produced a lot of absolutely stunning wines), having the background information on the two vintages handy in this sequel on these two vintages in Beaujolais seemed to be a logical decision. I did not bother to rewrite the vintage synopses, but rather just reprint it below, as I did put some effort into the first version to make the vintage report accurate and thorough. Both vintages had to contend with hail damage in some of the best communes, and 2016 also was beset with frost issues in the spring, so I am sure that few *vignerons* in the most-affected communes in the region will not look back fondly on the two growing seasons, but despite the weather hurdles, but years have produced some absolutely stunning wines.

The last couple of vintages of 2016 and 2017 have produced some absolutely superb bottles of Beaujolais, despite there being plenty of challenges from hail and other growing season depredations in both vintages. As readers may recall, the beautifully deep and classic crop of 2016 Beaujolais was not homogenous from commune to commune, as brutal hail ravaged many of the best cru vineyards in the villages of Chiroubles, Morgon and Fleurie in 2016. As I mentioned in my initial report on the 2016 vintage in Beaujolais, *vignerons* here had to contend with frost damage in many vineyards at the very outset of May, which led to expectations of shortened crops right from the spring wherever the freeze took root. Worse was to come for producers in the aforementioned communes of Chiroubles, Morgon and Fleurie a bit later in the month, as the first of two severe hailstorms wreaked havoc in the affected vineyards, with vines in Chiroubles particularly hard hit by this first round of hail damage. Mother nature did not relent after this first storm of late May, as more hail returned on June 24th and clobbered Fleurie for a second time and also struck some parts of Moulin-à-Vent on this passage, as well as Morgon and Chiroubles again. The weather after the second hailstorm was also far from ideal, with the heavy rains of that storm followed by hot and humid weather that gave rise to a severe powdery mildew threat that had to be addressed vigilantly for the coming weeks, as it seemed every time a *vigneron* had finished up a treatment against the mildew, more rain would arrive and wash it away and spraying was once again necessary to protect what was left of the crop. Fortunately, the weather wars of 2016 in Beaujolais were over by the end of July and the months of August and September were just beautiful and allowed the crop that was still out on the vines to ripen up perfectly under lovely Indian Summer conditions.

So, the 2016 vintage in Beaujolais is quite heterogeneous from the hail and frost damage and the threat of mildew. In the Cru communes that were spared from the hail (and where battling against potential mildew was carried to victorious results), such as Saint Amour and Juliénas north of the hail district, or in the Côte de Brouilly and Brouilly to the south, the crop was reasonable in size and just beautiful in quality. It was also a simply brilliant year for the wines from the southern half of the region, where Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages bottlings are the appellations in question, as there was no hail to be found in this half of the region. In the communes that were hit by hail, the quality can still be very good, albeit, often with a bit of a chewier, hard edge to the tannins, as physiological ripeness was a big challenge for the grapes remaining on the bunches in the villages where the hail damage was extensive, as the plants used much of their energy in the wake of the hail to try and repair damage to the wood and foliage, prior to ripening up bunches that were still out there. So, while these wines are not tainted by the hail with any “off” flavors or aromatics, as the affected berries fell to the ground in mid-summer, they can often be a touch green and dry-edged from tannins that did not quite ripen completely over the rest of the summer. Hence the variations in both style and quality between the hailed on communes (and not every vineyard in each commune was hit- other than in Chiroubles, which was pretty much flattened) and those that were spared in 2016, with the unaffected villages producing their finest wines since the great vintage of 2011.

Unfortunately, hail again played a role in the shaping of the style of certain communes’ wines in 2017, as the area centered on Fleurie was once again hit by a summer storm and the damage was nearly as bad as the year before. Moulin-à-Vent was also hailed on in 2017- even worse than the year before, and some of the finest vineyards in Morgon were hit by the hail once again in 2017. Clearly, summer storms are cropping up with more frequency and ferocity than

was the case in the region a generation ago, and sadly, the path of the hail in 2017 was almost the same as the year before, so the same domaines were pummeled two years in a row. The growing season had not gotten out of the blocks particularly well in 2017, as the weather was unseasonably hot during the *floraison*, which adversely affected the potential size of the crop and which was hardly welcomed by the *vignerons* who had been so badly hit by either frost or hail in 2016. And then, the hail hit (again), this time on the evening of July 10th, with a ferocity that was further whipped up by very strong winds, so that the small hailstones were whipped sideways through the air and again ravaged the vines. The epicenter of 2017's hail was Fleurie, but the damage was even more widespread than in the previous year, with the surrounding crus of Morgon, Moulin-à-Vent, and Chiroubles hit hard for a second year in a row, and damage also quite extensive in the northern half of Régnié and in Chénas as well. One *vigneron* described the wind as being so strong during the storm that it was like "hail tornado". The one silver lining is that Morgon was not quite as badly affected as the year before, as the severe hail damage was primarily confined to the two vineyards of la Corcelette and Charmes, and the Côte du Py and other vineyards in the commune were largely spared this year.

To add insult to injury, the Beaujolais region, alongside of the Côte d'Or and Chablis, had invested in "cloud seeding" technology to try and prevent hail from forming, but it was not fully effective in July of 2017. The regional associations have pursued the technology and situated one hundred and twenty-five generators in the vineyards of the greater Burgundy region that inject silver iodide into the clouds above to help prevent the formation of hailstones, and there is thought that the small size of the hail on July 10th was at least a partial success for the technology. The generators heat up the silver iodide particles and then shoot them high into the atmosphere to try and prevent the hail from forming in the clouds above, with the generators doing so every time the threat of hail in the forecast reaches a certain tipping point (usually a probability of forty percent). Many speculated that if the wind had not been so ferocious with this storm mid-July storm, the damage would have been far less than in the preceding year. I tried to find out a bit more about this technology prior to going to print with this report, as I wondered about whether the high winds could have been tied in some way to the injection of the heated silver iodide into the storm, as well as whether or not the silver iodide, which one assumes must descend again to earth with the rains of the storm, could adversely affect the *terroir* in the vineyards over an extended period of time. But, I was not able to find out a whole lot about this new technology and its adaption and will start asking around more when I am next in Burgundy.

With all of the weather challenges of 2017, it is hard to believe that once again, this is often an outstanding vintage in terms of quality, and the biggest issue for many producers is the tiny size of the crop- particularly in the communes that were hailed on again for the second year in a row. The wines of 2017 have generally turned out to be ripe, beautifully structured and quite deep at the core, with some of the plushness of the 2015s (though most often not as roasted or high in octane), coupled to the more soil-driven style that is prevalent in the most successful 2016s, so the combination is really quite exciting and my early dip into the vintage has found dozens and dozens of truly outstanding 2017 Beaujolais. As was the case in 2016, the southern half of the region, which is home to Beaujolais and Beaujolais-Villages level bottlings, is once again more consistent than up in the north where the Crus are located, as again the south was spared from any hail damage in 2017. When I was in the region last spring, the *vignerons* that I

spoke with were very, very excited about the potential quality of their 2017s (even if the quantity is going to be scant from domaines with holdings in the most hail-damaged Crus), and most producers rank this vintage ahead of both 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, so you can see that there is a lot of respect for the quality and style of the 2017 vintage in Beaujolais. Last spring, Jean-Étienne Chermette commented that “the 2017s look like a cross right now between the 2015s and 2016s, with more sappy, dense fruit tones than the 2016s, but also far more classical personalities and better *terroir* than the very powerful 2015s.” So, we have another excellent quality vintage in the region in 2017, with the caveat that it is again a bit heterogeneous in the communes that were badly hailed on again this year.

In the last couple of vintages, it has been useful to leave behind one’s traditional impression of the relative merits of the various communes in the constellation of the Cru Beaujolais, and also to pay more attention to the best Beaujolais bottlings from the south as well. The reason for this is the mid-summer hail in both vintages, which hit the heart and soul of the Crus in each vintage. The hail did not leave its mark as “hail taint” *per se*, as can be found in many 1983 red Burgundies for instance, but rather in less than perfect ripening of the grapes in the vineyards most severely affected by the storms. In the 2017 vintage, the hail damage on July 10th was sufficiently early that the berries most scarred by the hail simply dried up and fell off of the vines long before harvest, so there is no dry edge from hail damage in any of the wines that I have tasted from even the most hard hit vineyard parcels. Rather, the impact of the hail was more prominent in slowing the ripening process of the remaining berries in these vineyards, as the vines spent some of their July and August energy reserves rebuilding (or trying to do so) their vegetation, rather than all of the energy going into the ripening of the bunches. The result is often wines that are a bit more chewy from tannins that ended up lagging just a bit behind optimal, due to this lag caused by the plants trying to repair their leaves in the immediate wake of the hail. Consequently, the wines that show the most perfect ripening and exemplify the very finest potential of the vintage of 2017 are to be found in the communes and regions unaffected by the hail in July, and this includes the best bottlings from the south. It is particularly evident when one tastes the Beaujolais bottlings from Jean- Étienne Chermette, such as his Origine and Coeur de Vendanges, old vine cuvées, as in the southern half of Beaujolais, the growing season of 2017 could not have unfolded any better in this less tony sector of the appellation!

So this excellent Beaujolais vintage is not particularly homogenous in style, and there are distinct variations to be found from commune to commune and vineyard to vineyard. The variations also have to do with the stylistic predilections of the particular *vigneron*, as some winemakers just like riper, more powerful wines. Where there was no hail issue and attendant lags in maturation, there can still be issues with relative ripeness, as there are a percentage of the 2017s out there that are buxom, powerful and harken back a bit stylistically to the powerful and sometimes overripe 2015s. Others are extremely pure, refined and offer up measured, memorable ripeness coupled to great soil signatures. And yet other examples of the 2017s, often from the hail, are a bit chewier out of the blocks and not as concentrated at the core, as they did not ripen up as well as the examples from the vineyards unaffected by the hail of July. But, despite some of the variations to be found from cellar to cellar and Cru to Cru, the best 2017s are truly exceptional and will be cellar treasures for many, many years to come. My favorite wines of the vintage thus far remind me of a cross between the 2016 and 2011 vintages in the region, with great purity of fruit, excellent transparency down to their *terroirs* and lovely structures for long-

term aging. They are not generally as tannic as the stunning 2011s, but they are still noticeably structured for Beaujolais and many will want a year or three in the cellar to soften up and really start to drink well. But, the best 2017s are truly beautiful wines and loaded with promise!



Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages and Vin de France

2017 Eau Forte Gamay- Jean-Claude Lapalu

The Eau Forte bottling from Jean-Claude Lapalu comes from some of his younger vines (forty-five years of age and younger) in his Beaujolais-Villages and Brouilly parcels. He makes this as an early drinking, but serious wine. The 2017 shows the ripeness of the vintage, coming in at a full 14.5 percent octane, but offering up fine freshness on the nose in its combination of sappy black cherries, woodsmoke, violets, a bit of chocolate and a nice base of dark soil. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and plenty deep at the core, with a touch of tannin and some backend heat poking out on the long finish. This is a touch riper than I would like, but if one chills the wine for thirty minutes, it tames the alcohol a bit on the backend. 2019-2023. **87.**

2018 Beaujolais- Michel Guignier

The 2018 Beaujolais from Michel Guignier is a beautifully classic and sappy example of its appellation, with the bouquet jumping from the glass in a bright and inviting mix of black

cherries, quince, dark soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh thyme and violets. On the palate the wine is fullish, vibrant and bouncy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine soil signature, good complexity and grip and a bit of backend tannin adding conviction on the long and juicy finish. This is quite approachable already, but it is still fairly youthful and could do with six to twelve months in the cellar to allow the tannins to fade away and the wine to really blossom. Very classy Beaujolais! 2019-2035. **90.**

2017 Beaujolais-Villages “la Vauxonne”- Domaine Jacques Charlet

The 2017 Beaujolais-Villages “la Vauxonne” from Jacques Charlet is a lovely example, with the good deep color of the vintage and a bit of backend tannin that augurs well for its potential longevity. The bouquet offers up a bright and sappy nose of black cherries, sweet cranberries, a touch of white pepper, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and has lovely depth at the core, with fine focus and grip, a touch of tannin and a long, nascently complex finish. I like the chewy texture of this wine on the backend, as it reminds me of some of the 2011s when they were young. This is approachable today, but will be even better with a year or two in the cellar and is quite serious for a Beaujolais-Villages. 2019-2030. **89.**

2017 Beaujolais-Leynes- Château de Lavernette (Xavier et Kerrie Boissieu)

The 2017 Beaujolais-Leynes from Château de Lavernette is a nicely ripe and very pure example of the vintage, coming in at a classic thirteen percent octane and offering up a vibrant bouquet of black cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, violets and a lovely, gently savory topnote of fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and quite deep at the core for this appellation, with a bit of backend tannin, fine focus and grip and lovely length on the complex and succulent finish. This is very tasty already, but it has the structure to age very nicely for a decade or more and will be even better with a bit of bottle age! 2019-2035. **90.**

2017 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” V.V.- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2017 Beaujolais “Cuvée l’Ancien” from Jean-Paul Brun is excellent and very classic in aromatic personality in this vintage. The bouquet is very pure and transparent, jumping from the glass in a red fruity mix of cherries, cranberries, complex soil tones, floral notes redolent of both violets and lavender, a touch of fresh thyme and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is pure, quite full-bodied and shows the ripeness of the vintage more than the nose, with a plush core of fruit, good soil signature, a bit of chewy tannin and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is excellent, but it could do with a year or two in the cellar to allow its secondary layering to emerge and the touch of backend tannin to fall away. It is quite a powerful vintage for Monsieur Brun’s “Cuvée l’Ancien” (it is listed at 12.5 percent octane, but I suspect it is a bit higher), but still pure and soil-driven. 2021-2040+. **90+.**

Saint Amour

2017 Saint Amour- Domaine des Billards

The Domaine des Billards 2017 Saint Amour is a touch riper than customary, coming in listed at 13.5 percent, but in this vintage, that seems just perfect. As readers know, this is one of my absolute favorite Cru bottlings in the entire region and, in my opinion, is one of the great long-distance runners of Beaujolais. The 2017 Billards is a classic in the making, offering up a beautifully pure and still quite primary bouquet of red and black cherries, gamebird, woodsmoke, a hint of raw cocoa, a complex base of soil tones and a discreet floral topnote redolent of peonies. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a fine core of eventually

sappy fruit, an excellent structural chassis, moderate, seamless tannins and great focus and grip on the very, very long and nascently complex finish. This is the finest vintage of Billards since the 2011 and 2005, with perhaps greater purity and a more classical profile than those two previous vintages. It is a must buy for the cellar! 2023-2060. **95.**

2016 Saint Amour- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2016 Saint Amour from Georges Descombes is an excellent wine and just loaded with the red fruity personality of the commune. The expressive nose jumps from the glass in a mix of cherries, blood orange, bonfire, fresh thyme, a fine base of soil tones and spit-roasted *pigeon*. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with fine transparency, lovely balance and grip and a long, complex and flat out delicious finish. This is drinking with loads of personality today, but it seems likely to be at its best over the coming decade and may not be one of the longest-lived examples of this excellent Cru. 2019-2030. **92.**

2016 Saint Amour- Domaine de la Pirolette

I last tasted the 2016s from Virginie and Grégory Barbet's new project, Domaine de la Pirolette, back in the spring of 2018, when I spent a few days tasting in the region. I was very happy to see how they had evolved with a bit of bottle age. The regular bottling of Saint Amour from 2016 delivers excellent depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, vinesmoke, gamebird, fresh thyme, a fine base of soil elements and a topnote of woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, soil-driven and starting to blossom nicely, with an excellent core, modest tannins and a long, still fairly tightly-knit finish. The Domaine de la Pirolette bottlings are made for the cellar and though this wine is very tasty right now, it is still in climbing mode and will be more generous with a few more years' worth of bottle age. Fine, fine juice. 2019-2045. **92+.**

2016 Saint Amour "le Carjot"- Domaine de la Pirolette

This is one of the single vineyard bottlings that the Barbets began producing for the first time in the 2016 vintage. As I mentioned in the write up from my visit to the domaine, the vineyard of le Carjot is planted on blue granite which Grégory describes as quite similar to Côte du Py in Morgon. The wine is half barrel-fermented in nine hundred liter casks and half in cement tank, with the *elevage* taking place in those large barrels. This wine was pretty tight when I sampled it at the domaine, but it had not been in bottle all that long at the time. Today, the wine is really rounding into form beautifully, offering up a superb and very pure bouquet of black cherries, red plums, a touch of raw cocoa, gamebird, granitic soil tones, a touch of violet and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and sappy at the core, with excellent mineral drive, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, complex and very promising finish. This wine showed a bit of oak influence on both the nose and palate fifteen months ago, but now, it is only on the backend of the palate that there is still a bit of wood to integrate, as the nose has already absorbed it completely. This is outstanding Saint Amour in the making, and though it is quite approachable today, it still really deserves a bit more bottle age to fully blossom, as it is going to be absolutely stellar when it has finally opened up completely. 2022-2055+. **94.**

Fleurie

2017 Fleurie- Château de Fleurie

The 2017 Fleurie from Château de Fleurie is a good example of the vintage. The wine comes in a touch riper than in most vintages, listed at 13.5 percent, but it is also very pure and precise and shows no signs of *sur maturité* on the nose. The lovely bouquet wafts from the glass

in a mix of red and black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, gamebird, a touch of sweet nuttiness, fresh herbs and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and shows off lovely mid-plate depth, with fine focus and grip and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is more powerful on the palate than the nose suggests, and also a bit more marked by *sur maturité*, but it is reasonably fresh and should age nicely. Château de Fleurie makes one of my favorite wines in the appellation these days, but the 2017 is not stylistically my favorite recent vintage here. 2019-2040. **88.**

2009 Fleurie- Clos de la Roilette

It had been three years since I last drank a bottle of the 2009 Clos de la Roilette, and the wine has really hit its peak period of drinkability in the interim. The bouquet is complex and beautifully sappy, wafting from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, a bit of lavender, gamebird, dark soil tones, violets, a touch of chocolate, fresh thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, good soil signature, still nicely tangy acids and a whisper of backend tannin adding grip on the long and classy finish. This still has many, many years of life ahead of it, but it has really reached a lovely point in its evolution for current drinking. 2019-2040. **93+.**

Moulin-à-Vent

2017 Moulin-à-Vent- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

Jean-Paul Brun's 2017 Moulin-à-Vent is a pure and nicely structured example of the vintage, with plenty of ripe fruit, but classic purity and transparency down to the soil. The bouquet offers up a youthfully complex blend of dark berries, cassis, woodsmoke, a bit of chicory, dark soil tones and a hint of coffee bean. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and full-bodied, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, ripe tannins and a long, primary and promising finish. This is a wine built for the cellar and will need some bottle age before it really starts hitting on all cylinders, but it is not as massive and chewy as Monsieur Brun's Côte de Brouilly this year and will not be anywhere near as forbidding in its youth. 2021-2055+. **93.**

2017 Moulin-à-Vent "au Michelin"- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2016 vintage is the first Moulin-à-Vent from the *lieu à dit* of au Michelin produced by Mee Godard, but this 2017 is the first that I was able to taste. The *terroir* here in au Michelons is sandy-stony mixture and the wine tends to be a bit more polished structurally out of the blocks than Mee's lovely Morgon bottlings. The bouquet is deep, sappy and very lovely, offering up scents of sweet blackberries, cassis, espresso, a fine base of dark soil elements, gamebird, a hint of fresh thyme and a dollop of cola in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and peppery, with a fine core, excellent backend mineral drive, moderate tannins and a long, youthful and very nicely balanced finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom from behind its structural elements, but all of the pieces are in place for a long and superb life in bottle for this wine. 2023-2055+. **93+.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent- Château des Jacques

The regular bottling of Moulin-à-Vent from Château de Jacques (as opposed to the single vineyard bottlings) is outstanding in 2016. The deep, complex and generally youthful nose offers up scents of black cherries, dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, roasted *pigeon*, fresh thyme, a hint of vanillin oak and a superb base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and black fruity in personality, with fine soil signature, good balance and grip

and a bit of firm, backend tannin perking up the long and complex finish and promising an excellent life for cellar development. First class Moulin-à-Vent. 2019-2050+. **92.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos des Thorins”- Château des Jacques

The Château des Jacques 2016 Clos des Thorins is another fine example of the vintage, but there is just a hint of youthful austerity here that suggests the ripening of the bunches lagged just a hair in the wake of the late May hail in the appellation. However, there is depth, youthful complexity and nice inner sweetness to the wine as well, as the nose wafts from the glass in a mix of red berries, red plum, a touch of pomegranate, a fine base of soil, mustard seed, gamebird, a touch of lavender and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with moderate, ripe tannins, a nice touch of sappiness at the core, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and quite promising finish. This is going to be excellent with a bit of bottle age, but is a touch tight for primetime drinking at the present time. 2021-2050+. **92+.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Rocheegrès”- Château des Jacques

The 2016 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos de Rocheegrès” from Château des Jacques is a lovely example of the vintage, but is still young and is still showing a fair bit of its smoky new oak component. The bouquet delivers a fine blend of black cherries, cassis, *pigeon*, a fine base of dark soil tones, woodsmoke and the aforementioned new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, fine soil signature, just a touch of tannin and a long, well-balanced and very classy finish. This bottling used to have quite cedary, spicy new oak, but I find the new, more nutty and smoky style to the new wood component a far better match with the underlying fruit and *terroir* here and this change at the estate is a most welcome new development. This is an excellent and very refined wine. 2019-2055+. **94.**

2016 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos du Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

The 2016 Clos du Grand Carquelin from Château des Jacques is just a touch riper than the Clos de Rocheegrès, (13.5 versus thirteen percent) and a bit more youthfully structured out of the blocks. The excellent bouquet offers up a black fruity mix of dark berries, cassis, espresso, dark soil tones, a bit of bonfire, roasted gamebird and a nice, discreet touch of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with an excellent core of fruit, ripe, suave tannins and superb length and grip on the very well-balanced and youthful finish. This is not as *flatteur* out of the blocks as the Clos de Rocheegrès, but with a bit of bottle age, it will be every bit as classy. 2023-2055+. **94.**

2015 Moulin-à-Vent- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The Barbet brothers’ 2015 Moulin-à-Vent is a very good example of this ripe vintage, with the wine coming in listed at 13.5 percent octane. The last time I tasted this was at the domaine in March of 2018, where it stuck out a bit in a lineup of primarily 2016s, but it is aging very nicely and I like it even a bit more today than I did fifteen months ago. The nose still shows the ripeness of the torrid summer of 2015, offering up scents of black cherries, blackberries, a touch of coffee grounds, dark chocolate, hung game, dark soil tones, woodsmoke and a nice touch of violets in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with good focus and grip, a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex and quite tasty finish. I mentioned in the last report that this is not quite as transparent an example as is customary for this bottling, and this remains the case, but it has impressive depth and complexity and has a lot going for it, despite it being clearly a child of the torrid summer of 2015. 2019-2045. **91+.**



2013 Moulin-à-Vent “Champ de Cour”- Xavier et Nicolas Barbet

The single *climat* bottling of Moulin-à-Vent “Champ de Cour” from Xavier and Nicolas Barbet is their reserve cuvée from this appellation, with the wine spending a month on its fine lees after fermentation prior to racking into older Burgundy barrels for its *elevage*. The 2013 Champ de Cour is a stellar example of Moulin-à-Vent, offering up a pure and classic bouquet of cassis, sweet dark berries, woodsmoke, dark soil tones, a touch of chicory, roasted gamebird and a topnote of anise. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and still youthfully chewy, with excellent balance and grip, youthful complexity and outstanding length and grip on the still fairly primary finish. I love the backend energy and lift here, but this is still a young wine and deserves more time in the cellar to more fully blossom. It is going to be outstanding! There is just a bit of backend influence from the older casks here, which just adds to the structural chassis for the long haul, and I have little doubt that fifty years down the road this is still going to be drinking brilliantly! 2022-2060+. **94.**

2005 Moulin-à-Vent “Clos du Grand Carquelin”- Château des Jacques

The 2005 Clos du Grand Carquelin from Château des Jacques is a splendid example of Moulin-à-Vent, which at age fourteen is really starting to drink brilliantly. The oak treatment for this bottling is a bit different these days than was the case back in 2005, as the new wood in the blend was a bit more prominent back and cedary in personality in this era than I find in the recent releases, such as the lovely 2016s mentioned above. But, with fourteen years in the cellar, the wood is beautifully buried in the wine, with the nose offering up a very refined constellation of blackberries, cassis, dark soil tones, chicory, gamebird, a nice touch of eucalyptus, woodsmoke, cedar and the first whisper of the leafy soil tones that will come with further bottle age. On the

palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very precise, with a superb core, excellent mineral drive, still a bit of tannin and lovely length and grip on the beautifully balanced finish. It is hard to believe for a fourteen year-old Moulin-à-Vent, but this wine is still not quite at its apogee and is still getting better! That said, it is absolutely delicious to drink today! 2019-2050+. **94+**.

Chiroubles

2016 Chiroubles- Domaine Georges Descombes

Georges Descombes' 2016 Chiroubles is a lovely and beautifully sappy wine on both the nose and palate. The bouquet delivers a fine constellation of black cherries, sweet cranberries, woodsmoke, a bit of game, lovely, dark soil tones, violets and just the first whisper of autumnal shadings in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and nicely structured, with a fine core of fruit, just a touch of backend tannin and a long, complex finish. Monsieur Descombes bottles with a minimum of added SO₂ at bottling and this wine is nicely evolved as a result and really drinking well right now, but I would not plan to hold it more than five or six years in the cellar. 2019-2025. **91**.

2013 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes”- Domaine Damien Coquelet

It has been three and a half years since I last opened a bottle of the 2013 Chiroubles “Vieilles Vignes” from Damien Coquelet, and the wine has opened up dramatically since its early days. It has a bit of volatile acidity today (or at least this bottle did) and needs some decanting time to pull itself together, but it does quite nicely once it has had some aeration. Eventually, the bouquet delivers a blend of black cherries, cranberries, bonfire, balsam bough, sage, roasted *pigeon* and a good base of gently autumnal soil tones. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very transparent, with a solid core, tangy acids, melted tannins and a long, complex and gently rustic finish. This has loads of personality today, but it is also living life a bit on the edge structurally and probably will be best drunk up over the next few years, but it may surprise and last considerably longer. The real question is whether or not the volatile acidity in this particular bottle is emblematic of the wine in general, or was just this example? This bottle has a flaw or two, but such lovely complexity and soil signature at the same time that I am perfectly content to overlook the blemishes. 2019-2025. **89+?**

Morgon

2017 Morgon- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2017 Morgon from Georges Descombes comes in listed at a cool 12.5 percent octane on the label, which makes me think that it was hampered a bit during the growing season from the freak hailstorm that hit parts of Morgon in 2017. The wine is very pure on both the nose and palate, showing lovely precision in its aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, a touch of cranberry, gamebird, woodsmoke, a lovely dollop of spice, gentle floral tones and a fine base of granitic soil. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and impressively light on its feet for a 2017 Morgon, with a good touch of sappiness at the core, fine soil signature, just a wisp of tannin and a long, tangy and quite complex finish. This is lovely and quite low fat in personality for the vintage. 2019-2030+. **92**.

2017 Morgon “La Voûte Saint-Vincent”- Louis-Claude Desvignes

The 2017 Morgon “La Voûte Saint-Vincent” from Louis-Claude Desvignes is a lovely, ripe and gently meaty example of the vintage. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine blend of

red and black cherries, smoked meats, raw cocoa, a fine base of dark soil tones, a touch of pepper and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, chewy and not as wide open as the nose suggests, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and gently peppery finish. I am guessing that these vines were hit with the hailstorm in the spring and the wine has ended up structured and in need of some bottle age to blossom, but it should prove to be quite good when it has a chance to soften up. 2023-2055. **89+**.

2017 Morgon “Montpelain”- Louis-Claude Desvignes

Louis-Claude Desvignes’ 2017 Morgon “Montpelain” is his first bottling from this *lieu à dit* on the eastern edge of Morgon, near the Fleurie border. It is planted to eighty year-old vines and used to be blended into the La Voûte Saint-Vincent bottling. The 2017 Montpelain offers up a beautifully pure bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, bonfire, lovely soil tones and a bit of chicory in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full, focused and nicely balanced, with a good core of fruit, superb soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, youthfully complex and promising finish. Montpelain lies in the sector of Morgon that was hit by hail, so this wine is not as ripe and powerful as some 2017s, but it has depth, transparency and plenty of promise. Just give it at least a few years in the cellar to start to blossom. 2021-2055. **91.**

2017 Morgon “Corcelette”- Domaine Mee Godard

Corcelette was one of the *lieu à dits* in Morgon that was hailed upon in this vintage, but the 2017 Corcelette bottling from Mee Godard has turned out quite well despite this. The wine is deep and very pure, offering up a quite primary bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, a bit of roasted meats, dark soil tones, lovely spice elements and a touch of espresso. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and tightly-knit, with a good core, fine transparency, well-measured tannins and a long, promising finish that closes with a touch of pepper. This needs time to open up, but it is going to be quite good, though never one of the voluptuous or sappy examples of the vintage. 2023-2055. **91.**

2017 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Domaine Mee Godard

The 2017 Morgon “Côte du Py” from Mee Godard is one of her wines that was spared from hail damage in this summer, allowing the wine to reach a riper octane level than the Corcelette and come in at a full fourteen percent. Aromatically, the wine is lovely, offering up scents of blackberries, black cherries, dark chocolate, lovely soil tones, roasted meats, a touch of fresh thyme and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is young, deep and full-bodied, with a rock solid core, fine mineral drive, ripe, firm tannins and a long, tangy and adolescent finish. This is my favorite of Mee’s 2017 Morgons, but like the other two bottlings, it is emphatically built for the long haul this year! 2023-2060+. **93.**

2017 Morgon “Grand Cras”- Domaine Mee Godard

Mee Godard’s 2017 Morgon “Grand Cras” is a full degree riper than her Corcelette (fourteen versus thirteen percent), showing that this parcel was not affected by the summer hailstorm. The wine is lovely on both the nose and palate, offering up a sappy bouquet of black cherries, black plums, chocolate, dark soil tones, roasted gamebird and a hint of violet in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and rock solid at the core, with plenty of ripe tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is as structured as the Corcelette out of the blocks, but has more buffering mid-palate stuffing to give the impression of earlier accessibility. I would still opt to bury it in the cellar for at least a few years and let the tannins soften up a bit more. 2023-2060+. **92+.**

2017 Morgon “la Roche Pilée”- Michel Guignier

The “la Roche Pilée” from Michel Guignier is the new name for what Monsieur Guignier previously called “Bio-Vitis”, with the wine having always hailed from sixty year-old vines in this vineyard parcel adjacent to Côte du Py. The 2017 Morgon “la Roche Pilée” comes in at an even thirteen percent octane and offers up a beautifully pure and expressive bouquet of sappy red and black cherries, a bit of sweet cranberry, woodsmoke, gamebird, a great base of soil and just a whisper of fresh thyme in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off plenty of depth at the core, with fine balance and grip, a bit of ripe backend tannin and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. As the Côte du Py was spared from hail damage in 2017, I have to assume that the la Roche Pilée that lies at its foot was also not hit, and there is nothing here that would lead me to believe otherwise. This is an excellent young bottle of Morgon, but it deserves at least three or four years in the cellar to properly blossom. 2022-2055. **92+.**

2017 Morgon- Antoine Sunier

The 2017 Morgon from Antoine Sunier is produced from a fine parcel of organically-farmed, sixty year-old vines in the les Grands Cras. To the best of my knowledge, les Grands Cras was not hit by the hail in midsummer in Morgon. The wine comes in at a lovely and classic thirteen percent and offers up a pure and complex bouquet of black cherries, sweet dark berries, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, peonies, gamebird, a bit of balsamic topnotes and fresh thyme. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and really deep and pure at the core, with excellent soil signature, a nice touch of backend tannin and a long, tangy and beautifully balanced finish. This is easy to drink today, but it is still a puppy and really deserves some time in the cellar to more properly blossom. There is a beautiful core of sappy black fruit buried deep that will come to the fore with some bottle age. 2019-2050+. **93+.**

2017 Morgon- Julien Sunier

Julien Sunier’s fine bottling of Morgon hails from parcels of vines in Corcelette, Charmes and Côte du Py, with the first two of these having been somewhat affected by the July hail of 2017. The wine shows well aromatically out of the blocks despite this, coming in at a classic octane level of thirteen percent and offering up a precise and youthful bouquet of cherries, pomegranate, sweet cranberries, a touch of raw cocoa, discreet nutty tones redolent of macadamia nuts, a complex base of soil and a dusting of mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied and pretty tightly-knit for this cuvée, with fairly moderate ripeness, a bit of tannin and fine length and grip on the youthful finish. Due to the hail, this is not a particularly plush example of the 2017 vintage, but it is clean as a whistle, has lovely balance and should blossom into a very, very good bottle of low fat Morgon with a bit of bottle age. 2022-2050. **91.**

2017 Morgon- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2017 Morgon from Domaine des Terres Dorées offers up lovely transparency in its aromatic constellation of red and black cherries, beetroot, fresh thyme, gentle smokiness, complex soil tones and spit-roasted gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full and moderately tannic, with a youthful personality, good purity at the core and a long, primary and well-balanced finish. This clearly got some hail in the spring and the wine lagged a bit in ripeness as a result, but in the hot summer of 2017, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It will need some bottle age to start to open up, but it has fine constituent components and will be a fine bottle in due course. 2022-2055+. **91+.**



2016 Morgon- Château des Jacques

The 2016 Morgon from Château des Jacques is a fine, young bottle. The bouquet is bright and promising, offering up scents of cranberry, cherry, pomegranate, fresh herb tones, bonfire, a bit of gamebird and a good base of stony soil elements. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and still youthfully tangy, with good, but not great ripeness, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is approachable today, but it is still fairly tight and will be more relaxed and generous on the palate with three or four years in the cellar. It will age long and gracefully. 2022-2050. **90+**.

2016 Morgon “Côte du Py”- Château des Jacques

The Château de Jacques 2016 Côte du Py is really a lovely bottle of Morgon and shows absolutely no ill effects from the battles with hail and frost that plagued this commune in the spring and early summer of this growing season. The bouquet is deep, pure and nicely sappy, offering up a complex nose of red and black cherries, a touch of plummy, spit-roasted *pigeon*, a superb base of soil, raw cocoa, woodsmoke and a whisper of fresh thyme in thyme upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and grip, ripe, seamless tannins and a long, tangy and soil-driven finish. An outstanding, young bottle of Morgon, and given the climactic conditions in this Cru in 2016, this wine is an absolutely transcendental example of the vintage! I have always liked the wines from Château de Jacques, but I have the sense that in the last few vintages they have moved up to the next quantum level of quality. 2022-2065+. **93+**.

Régnié

2017 Régnié- Château de la Pierre (Jean Loron)

The 2017 Régnié from Château de la Pierre is a new bottling from the Jean Loron family, whose outstanding holdings include Domaine des Billards in Saint Amour and the Château de Fleurie. The wine has been bottled without any added SO₂ in this vintage and comes in at a cool 12.5 percent octane. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a sappy blend of black cherries, sweet dark berries, gamebird, a touch of pepper, gentle smokiness and a fine base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, juicy and nicely soil-driven, with a good core of fruit, impressive lightness of step on the backend (particularly for a 2017) and just a bit of backend tannin adding grip. This is good juice, but it will want drinking up over the near-term. 2019-2025. **89.**

2017 Régnié- Antoine Sunier

The 2017 Régnié from Antoine Sunier is one of the lower octane examples of the vintage I have come across, as this wine comes in listed at a cool 12.5 percent alcohol. The bouquet here is still nicely ripe and sappy, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, pomegranate, woodsmoke, a touch of citrus zest, a fine base of dark soil tones and a wide array of upper register spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and vibrant, with a fine core of fruit, fine focus and grip, a bit of ripe, backend tannin and a long, complex and gently herbaceous finish. I would guess that the lower octane level here is a reflection of the aftermath of the hail in July in the commune, as the vines probably exerted quite a bit of energy to repairing the damaged foliage prior to restarting the ripening of the bunches. In any case, other than the lower alcohol and the bit of backend tannin from the more moderate ripening, this wine has turned out really beautifully and avoided any of the potential pitfalls of *sur maturité* in 2017 and should prove to be a long-lived and very fine example of Régnié. A lovely bottle. 2019-2040+. **91+.**

Brouilly

2017 Brouilly- Domaine Georges Descombes

The 2017 Brouilly from Georges Descombes is really pretty on both the nose and palate (as good Brouilly should be!), with the bouquet wafting from the glass in a beautifully red fruity and wide open blend of cherries, cranberries, fresh thyme, complex soil tones, gentle smokiness and just a whisper of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, bouncy and fullish, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine transparency and just a bit of tannin perking up the long, complex and tangy finish. This has lovely balance and is very tasty out of the blocks, but with the stuffing to age nicely over the medium-term. 2019-2025+. **91.**

2017 Brouilly “La Croix des Rameaux”- Jean-Claude Lapalu

Jean-Claude Lapalu’s bottling of Brouilly “La Croix des Rameaux” hails from, organically-certified, fifty year-old vines that actually lie in the next door appellation of Côte de Brouilly. The wine is aged six to eight months in older Burgundy casks prior to bottling. The 2017 version is a typically ripe example of the vintage, coming in at a robust 14.5 percent octane and offering up a sappy and plummy bouquet of black cherries, black plums, chocolate, a good base of soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, plush and plenty ample at the core, with fine focus and grip, a bit of backend, ripe tannin and a long, gently heady and complex finish. This is a big boy for a Brouilly, but has structure and breed to go along with its exuberance of fruit and should age pretty nicely over the mid-term. 2019-2030. **89.**

2017 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes”- Jean-Claude Lapalu

The 2017 Brouilly “Vieilles Vignes” from Jean-Claude Lapalu (hailing also from fifty year-old vines, but these within the appellation of Brouilly proper) is quite a bit lower in octane than the La Croix des Rameaux, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol this year. This wine is raised in tank, rather than older cask and the 2017 delivers a fine aromatic constellation of cherries, red plums, gamebird, a bit of cocoa powder, fresh thyme, woodsmoke and a gently floral topnote. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied, focused and wide open in personality, with a fine core of red fruit, good soil signature and a long, complex and bouncy finish. This is a lovely example of Brouilly. 2019-2030. **91.**

Côte de Brouilly

2017 Côte de Brouilly- Jean-Claude Lapalu

Monsieur Lapalu’s vineyard holdings for his Côte de Brouilly are north-facing, on the same side of the mountain as Nicole Chanrion’s vineyards. He raises this wine in used *tonneaux* prior to bottling and bottles with very low SO2 levels. This is his lowest octane 2017, coming in at an even thirteen percent. The wine is pure and utterly classic, wafting from the glass in a refined and quite complex blend of red and black cherries, gamebird, stony soil tones, a bit of hazelnut, coffee bean, woodsmoke and a beautifully vivid topnote of lavender. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and nicely structured, with moderate tannins, a fine core of fruit, lovely transparency and a long, nascently complex and very promising finish. This is outstanding. 2021-2045+. **93.**

2017 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Ambassades”- Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes

The 2017 Côte de Brouilly “Cuvée Ambassades” from Domaine du Pavillon de Chavannes is excellent and one of the “cooler” examples of the 2017 vintage I have had the pleasure to taste. The bright, complex and youthful nose jumps from the glass in a mix of red and black cherries, sweet cranberry, bonfire, gamebird, stony soil tones and a fine topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and tangy, with a tightly-knit, youthful personality out of the blocks, excellent focus and grip, a touch of backend tannin and a long, mineral-infused finish. This has lovely purity and precision for the warm summer of 2017. 2019-2045. **92+.**

2017 Côte de Brouilly- Domaine des Terres Dorées (Jean-Paul Brun)

The 2017 Côte de Brouilly from Jean-Paul Brun comes in listed at 12.5 percent octane, but strikes me as riper than its stated level. The bouquet is deep, pure and sappy, jumping from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, pomegranate, a touch of sweet blackberry, gamebird, bonfire and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, powerful and chewy, with a rock solid core, plenty of ripe backend tannins, fine focus and grip and a long, youthful and promising finish. This is a broad-shouldered and structured example of Côte de Brouilly and it needs a fair bit of the time in the cellar to soften before it will start to drink with even a semblance of generosity. However, it is not overripe at all and once it starts to relax a bit structurally, it is going to be excellent, and the wine is going to age forever! But, it is not going to graduate from charm school for at least another four or five years. 2024-2055+. **92.**