



THE  
WORLD'S  
MOST ADMIRABLE  
CHAMPAGNE  
BRANDS 2025

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INTERNATIONAL

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BY APPOINTMENT  
TO H.M. QUEEN ELIZABETH II  
PURVEYORS OF CHAMPAGNE  
CHAMPAGNE BOLLINGER S.A.

# CHAMPAGNE BOLLINGER

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For the 12th edition of The World's Most Admired Champagne Brands we've extended the list from 30-40. This speaks volumes about the increasing quality across the board in Champagne as a broader range of houses attract votes from our panel of independent experts.

The unflappable Louis Roederer has retained its title as The World's Most Admired Champagne Brand, making it six in a row. It's difficult to think of another brand with the same admiration from the drinks trade, although Krug and Bollinger look like prime candidates to challenge the throne in 2026.

Much like the success of Louis Roederer, the reputation of this ranking continues to shine under the guidance of our esteemed champagne guru Giles Fallowfield. His contacts within the region, combined with the longstanding reputation of *Drinks International*, make a fine vintage. But beyond his contacts lists, be sure to read the in-depth harvest report on page 53, which is one of the most authoritative on-the-ground reports in the business.

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# HOW WE DID IT

## THE METHODOLOGY BEHIND THE COMPILATION OF THE WORLD'S MOST ADMIRED CHAMPAGNE BRANDS LIST

Now in its 12th year, *Drinks International's* Most Admired Champagne Brands survey was once again conducted by a panel of independent industry experts. We polled leading sommeliers, retail buyers, wholesalers, bar managers, Masters of Wine and specialist wine writers. This ranking follows the same format as the other supplements in our Most Admired series, with each

academy member asked to select the five brands they most admire in descending order. The voters were advised to consider:

- The quality and consistency of the brand's champagne, paying particular attention to its flagship non-vintage expression, but also focusing on the entire range.
- The strength of the branding and marketing.
- The price-to-quality ratio across the range – does it

“THE BRANDS FEATURED ON THIS LIST ARE ALL ESTABLISHED, PRESTIGIOUS AND AVAILABLE GLOBALLY”

justify its price point?

- How much they respect and admire the champagne house.
- How strong the brand is in relation to its peers within the champagne sector.

The brands featured on this list are all established, distinguished and available globally and our esteemed champagne expert Giles Fallowfield has provided his authoritative harvest report and profile of each house in our prestigious list.







BY APPOINTMENT  
TO H.M. QUEEN ELIZABETH II  
PURVEYORS OF CHAMPAGNE  
POL ROGER

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# 1 LOUIS ROEDERER

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**H**ard to believe it perhaps, but Louis Roederer has topped The World's Most Admired Champagne Brands table yet again. That's a record-breaking six consecutive victories. Roederer has triumphed in more than half the years that I have been putting the report together. Seven out of 11 in fact. An amazing achievement.

Getting to the top of the pile in this survey is quite an achievement. Staying there is another level of challenge, something only Bollinger has also achieved for two consecutive years, back in 2014 and 2015. Remaining at the top level requires constant vigilance, invention, attention to detail and no little investment.

Even though big businesses have bought up many 'family concerns' in Champagne over the past decade or so, families such as the Rouzauds remain at the heart of many of the appellation's leading houses and all those that have previously topped this survey.

Current chief executive Frédéric Rouzaud took over from his father Jean-Claude as head of this famous house in 2006. The two of them have shaped the business over the past five decades with Jean Claude aged 32 managing things from 1974, after seven years in charge of running the crucial Roederer vineyard estate. An estate that now extends to 242ha and which supplies just over two thirds of Roederer's grape requirements. Both men have sensibly put this vineyard treasure – only two or three other major houses boast this sort of vineyard holding – at the very heart of the business.

Thanks to Jean-Claude's detailed knowledge of these vineyards, predominantly located in top grands and premiers crus, one of his first wine initiatives was

to create Cristal Rosé. It was, says head winemaker Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, "a great vision to put specific vineyard sites at the centre of Cristal Rosé production with the first vineyard plot selection" he dubs a "Musigny selection of plots". Today all the Roederer wines are based on specific vineyard selections and, says Lécaillon, "this wine-grower-like philosophy sits at the heart of the Roederer range".

## CRISTAL ON TOUR

This past autumn Roederer celebrated the 50th anniversary of Cristal Rosé with a once-in-a-lifetime vertical tasting of this glorious cuvée, matched with fine food in a top restaurant in its 10 most important export markets. The dynamic duo of Lécaillon and Rouzaud took this wine, that Rouzaud's father introduced to the range back in 1974, on tour.

And what a tour it was, kicking off appropriately at La Tour

d'Argent in Paris and then visiting London, the US, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Singapore, Finland and Spain in quick succession.

Those of us lucky enough to attend tasted in magnums pairs of wines, kicking off with 2012 and 2013, followed by 2008 and 1995, and then 1989 and 1976, two of Champagne's sunniest harvests and the latter the driest vintage on record. There followed 2002 Cristal Rosé Vinothèque, also in magnum.

"Oldest to youngest or youngest to oldest? We think we have to start with the youngest because," says Lécaillon, speaking at the London tasting, "they embody all the work we have done in the vineyard since 1974. Crystal Rosé comes still from the same five plots that Jean-Claude selected. Three Pinot Noir plots in Ay, 'the Musigny of Champagne' and Chardonnay from Avize and Le Mesnil-sur-Oger. We use Ay Pinot Noir because these plots

produce wine with a special tannin complexity that's more saline, integrated and aromatic."

We try the 2013 and 2012 together. Lécaillon notes 2013 is "very tight with a lot of precision, very beautiful and tastes like it did 11 years ago. It hasn't aged at all". The 2012 is an altogether "riper, richer, rounder, juicier, creamier vintage, that's a bit more Pinot Noir in definition than the '13".

With the next pair of magnums, 2008 and 1995, we reach in the former the first year when all the Cristal estate has been converted to organic farming. "We have 136ha certified organic today," says Lécaillon, "the biggest in Champagne." We sense also with the 2008 that this is where Lécaillon wants to go with the blend, it's so fresh with lovely fruit quality; all his innovations and tweaks have come together in one wine. "It's one of the greatest Cristal Rosés we've made," he says.

With the '89 and '76, Lécaillon notes we are looking at two hot vintages. "It was so hot in 1989," he says, "with no temperature control in the cellars we resorted to spraying cold water on the tanks." A random initiative that later led to the idea of cold soaking they have adopted today. "Who would believe this is 35-year-old wine? Champagne at its best." With the '76, and this is the sixth time he's tried it whether in magnum or bottle: "I always find it fresh." Both wines benefit from phenolic ripeness and demonstrate persuasively that champagne doesn't need acidity to stay fresh for several decades.

Roederer continues to benefit from the great attention to detail the team applies to every aspect of the business and every wine in the range, whether it's the top of the tree Cristal Rosé or the multi-vintage blend of the Collection wines. And that's what's keeping it ahead of the pack still in our Most Admired survey.





# 2 KRUG

KRUG.COM

While back in 2024 Krug was seriously closing the gap on top-placed Louis Roederer and came as close as anyone has to breaking its dominance, this time round it's been in a close-fought battle with Bollinger for second place in the Most Admired Champagne Brands standings. It's curious to see how fortunes fluctuate slightly at the top of the table. Perhaps it's fair to say that Krug hasn't been so active in the market this year if that's an influence on voting patterns, as we suspect it is.

While it's now close on a decade since Krug came top of the tree in 2016, second place for the fourth year on the trot isn't too shabby. Olivier Krug is certainly doing his best to keep the brand and the wine his family created front of mind. He was on tour in the early part of 2024 talking about their latest vintage release, which to everyone's surprise was from the 2011 harvest. At the time, 2011 was the third August harvest in Champagne (there have since been four more in 2017, '18, '20 and '22) and it was a year few other houses elaborated, mainly because the erratic weather resulted in variable quality for the black grapes, although Chardonnay fared better.

As customary with the last few vintage releases from the house, they are presented alongside the Grande Cuvée blend that is based on the same harvest, which always makes for a very interesting comparison. This is especially true with a difficult harvest like 2011, described by winemakers at the time as a 'mixed bag', with picking starting as early as 19 August in the southernmost Côte des Bar region.

To set our palates we kicked off the tasting with the current release of Grande Cuvée, 171ème Édition,



which is based on the 2015 harvest, though Krug himself prefers to describe it as a blend of 12 years, with 2000 the oldest and 2015 the youngest.

From bud break to harvest, 2015 was the hottest vintage ever (since the CIVC started keeping records), even exceeding 2003 and 1976. It was also one of the driest. One prominent winemaker said at the time: "Harvest 2015 is a dream year. Sunny, dry, no downy mildew, no rot, 98% of our

**"FROM BUD BREAK TO HARVEST, 2015 WAS THE HOTTEST VINTAGE EVER, EVEN EXCEEDING 2003 AND 1976"**

vineyards could have been organic"

Krug notes that head winemaker Julie Cavil's aim in blending Grande Cuvée is "to make the most generous expression of champagne each year" but concedes that Cavil's stylistic preferences "lean more towards citrus than butter". This is something which can be seen in Édition 171 where Cavil says: "We looked for fresher years from our reserve library, including the harvests of 2008, 2013 and 2014, to bring vivacity and tension to the blend" and Meuniers from four harvests are used "to add an assertive quality".

## FINESSE AND POWER

Of the 2011 wines, first we taste the newly released 2011 vintage, nicknamed by winemaker Julie Cavil and her team as "spirited roundness". It's a blend of 46% Pinot Noir to 37% Chardonnay and 17% Meunier. She describes it as both "opulent and crisp," allying finesse and power with a spontaneous and vibrant side to produce a wine that's

"ample, generous and assertive". At release it certainly has the citrus freshness to put it in the 2004 rather than the 2006 camp.

These days, given the preponderance of warm, sunny harvests, getting the right balance in any blend of Grande Cuvée is more an issue of finding freshness in the reserve wines than adding richness, Krug notes.

While it seems finding suitable good Chardonnay which makes up 37% of the 2011 vintage blend was not an issue, they had to look harder to find enough Pinot Noir that accounts for 46%, with Meunier adding the remaining 17%. But LVMH does have access to many top terroirs, and one wonders if Krug 2011 would have been made at all had Dom Pérignon released 2011.

Asked what volume they need to achieve to allow any vintage to be declared by the house, Olivier Krug says they like to have enough stock for two years of sales.

The tasting ends with Grande Cuvée 167ème Édition, which is also 2011 harvest based, though it has 191 individual wines from 13 years, the oldest dating back to 1995, which Olivier Krug references as a Bouzy reserve wine. Curiously it's almost exactly the same grape composition – 47% Pinot Noir, 36% Chardonnay and 17% Meunier. But even allowing for the fact that it was disgorged in the third quarter of 2018 and has benefited significantly from that longer post disgorgement ageing period, versus the 18 months 2011 vintage has so far had, the wines are currently at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their complexity.

If part of the exercise in showing these two wines together is to demonstrate the completeness and great ageing potential inherent in every Grande Cuvée blend, then it's certainly a great success. But 167ème Édition does rather overshadow the new vintage release.





# 3 BOLLINGER

## CHAMPAGNE-BOLLINGER.COM

Since topping the Most Admired ratings in 2017, Bollinger 'slumped' to fifth for two years and now has gradually climbed back to third place. This year it was touch and go if it would surpass Krug – a couple more votes would have done it. It remains the only brand other than Roederer and Krug which in the 12 years we have run the Most Admired survey has never been out of the top five.

In the run-up to its bicentenary celebrations in 2029 it's been another active year for the brand. Last March there was the spectacular lunchtime launch in Paris of La Grande Année 2015, white and pink, in the historic surroundings of Le Philanthro-Lab in the Latin Quarter's Rue de la Bûcherie. Some very special wines were made in 2015 and winemaker Denis Bunner sees the opulent, powerful, earthy style of the year as being very close to the soul of a Bollinger vintage.

Such is the power and generosity of the Pinot Noir from this vintage, it has 40% Chardonnay in the blend for balance. Directeur générale Charles-Armand de Belenet said that this, the highest amount of Chardonnay Bollinger ever used in La Grande Année, just as in 2002, was needed to tame the Pinot that was mainly sourced from Bollinger's own vineyards in Verzenay (26%), home base of Aÿ (20%) plus Mareuil-sur-Aÿ. The Chardonnay was from Chouilly and Avize.

It was, he said: "A very special and challenging vintage, where one of the issues was avoiding vegetal aromas in the finished wines, which Bollinger managed to do in part thanks to its use of 100% oak barrel fermentation [and the selective process that followed]. After a mild winter and a super dry year there was only sufficient

water thanks to the chalky subsoils in the grand and premier cru sites used." The 2015 harvest started on 7 September and ended on 22 when the grapes for the red wine element in LGA Rosé were picked in the La Côte aux Enfants vineyard next to the winery.

The wines were served in bottle and magnum at the lunch – the

latter far fresher and suggesting the considerable ageing potential of the vintage. As a vinous treat and a suggestion of where the 2015 may be heading with time, jeroboams of 1989 were produced alongside cheese – 28-month Comté and Tomme de Brebis – from affineur Bernard Antony to bring the meal to a vinous climax.

## LUNCHTIME TASTING

Later in the autumn Bunner was in London to share his thoughts about the just-completed 2024 harvest and introduce two very special 2014 vintage releases. In a Pinot Noir-themed lunch at Apricity in Mayfair's Duke Street, Bunner and chef Chantelle Nicholson devised an inspired menu to match the five different Bollinger Blanc de Noirs.

The lunchtime tasting kicked

off with the previous release of Bollinger's relatively new PN series, PN AYC18 served in magnum. The larger format and extra age on the cork since release served to emphasise the depth, spicy warmth and generosity of this particular wine, especially compared to the new zesty, fresh PN VZ19 that followed.

"This is principally made from Verzenay fruit (plus Pinot from Aÿ, Avenay, Louvois, Mutigny and Tauxières) blended with 25% 2009 vintage reserve magnums from Verzenay," said Bunner. "It was a very hot year in 2019 and we achieved a record level of potential alcohol at 11%, while 2009 was a fresher, cooler vintage."

With an attractive, zesty grapefruit-skin note, Bunner liked its "length and salinity, chalky density and the nice bitterness on the aftertaste".

Bollinger La Côte aux Enfants 2014 followed. This single plot Pinot Noir was introduced to the range only in 2022 with the 2012 vintage and comes from an elevated parcel in Aÿ with twin aspects. The warmer, south-facing slope is made into red wine, while this comes from the north-western facing side which has been producing exceptional quality for many years.

For the Vieilles Vignes Françaises (VVF) 2014, Bunner says there are lots of cherry notes, orange blossom on the palate, with a slight natural sweetness it's finished with a 4g/l dosage.

The two lunch-paired launches in Paris and London underlined the fact that these Bollinger vintage champagnes are great wines, first and foremost, which are really seen at their best with food. The year ended on a high note for Bollinger with the renewal in mid-December of the Royal Warrant, marking 140 years of continuous supply to the royal household. King Charles obviously likes a glass of Bolly with his supper.

"IN THE 12 YEARS WE HAVE RUN THE MOST ADMIRABLE SURVEY, BOLLINGER HAS NEVER BEEN OUT OF THE TOP FIVE"







# BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD

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# 4 BILLECART-SALMON

## CHAMPAGNE-BILLECART.FR

Billecart sees the merit in a 'two-pronged attack' with a pair of major tastings in the spring and autumn of 2024. It's good for keeping the brand front of mind for any journalists looking for a decent story about champagne. And pretty well anything that Billecart-Salmon does under chief executive Mathieu Roland-Billecart's dynamic leadership is highly likely to result in good press, partly because he entirely grasps what is needed to make it so.

He has openly revealed his plans for the quiet revolution he is overseeing at the house stage by stage since he took over running the business in January 2019, and the significant tweaks to the wines staying in the range and the logic behind the decisions about lines that have had to go.

He has already established himself as one of the best communicators among a new generation of leaders at the major houses. He is, of course, helped by the general goodwill towards the house and its very well received wines, but he has sensibly focused initially on the Brut Réserve, typically the biggest-selling wine in any producer's range and always the hardest to maintain at a high level, let alone improve in a widely recognised and accepted way. As he said in early 2023: "That's what we felt we could do the most with, and one of the [main] things we are doing is giving it an extra year of ageing before release."

The five other initiatives to transform this wine involve changing the sourcing of the Meunier in the blend (as we noted last year) to just four crus, Damery and Venteuil on the right bank and Leuvrigny and Festigny on the left of the Marne, a quartet he refers to as the 'grands crus' for Meunier.

The proportion of réserve wines in the blend is being increased, with typically as many as 15 past vintages involved in the new assemblage and greater use of their perpetual reserve. As a proportion of the reserve wines used increased from 55% of the blend in '18-based wine to 62% in the '19 based to 71% in the current 2020-based wine, the perpetual reserve proportion rose from 9% in 2018 base, to 35% in the 2020-based wine.

Also using a larger proportion of wines vinified in oak barrels to add richness and complexity – this moved up from between 2-4% of the blend to 8% by the 2020-based wines and will eventually settle at around 10%, he says.

All this work on the Brut Réserve blend made it possible to bring the dosage down further with each base year from the level of 9.1gm/l with the 2016 before the changes, to 6.2gm/l with the '18 base down to just 3gm/l dosage with the '19 and '20-based wines, making them extra brut in style. This logically resulted in a name change to La Réserve from the new 2020-based wine now on the market, reflecting both the increase in reserve wine and the fall in the dosage.

### SIMPLER BLEND

The other step that made all of the above possible was the creation of a second Brut sans Année, the first of which was also based on the 2018 harvest. This is a simpler, more youthful NV blend called Inspiration 1818, a one third of each variety assemblage only available in certain limited markets that don't take the Brut Réserve. "It's not designed as a second wine," emphasises Roland-Billecart.

In a tasting he ran late in May 2023 at London's 67 Pall Mall, he first told journalists about the existence of Inspiration 1818 and gave the small group the opportunity to taste the initial two '18 and '19-based Brut Réserves



"THE  
PROPORTION  
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BLEND IS BEING  
INCREASED"

during its evolution. He repeated the exercise last year at the same venue, showing four wines side by side. He started with the '16-based Brut Réserve blend plus the evolution through '18 and '19 to the final 2020 blend, inviting us to contrast and compare. He even threw in a bottle of the 1818 '18-based blend, to satisfy our curiosity about that, even though it won't ever be available in the UK.

Roland-Billecart's efforts to transform this wine in just the

first six years of his tenure is quite something. Notwithstanding the fact that the 'pre-revolution' '16-based blend looked rather good with the extra bottle age top NV champagne always benefits from, the change for the better was discernible in terms of extra palate density, texture, length and complexity.

Asked if there would be a new, substantially higher price for La Réserve to reflect all these increased production costs, he said there had only been "one increase in the year and it was not so dramatic as some others, we don't demand seesawing". Importantly, he notes the Billecart family and his two uncles who ran the business before him see this "not as a cost, but as an investment in our wines for the future".

We feel Billecart's high standing in the Most Admired rankings reflects this philosophy and shows they have what it takes to go higher still. 🌿





CHAMPAGNE  
**BILLECART  
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# 5 CHARLES HEIDSIECK

## CHARLESHEIDSIECK.COM

In the past decade I have been writing this report Charles Heidsieck has never been lower than seventh in the rankings and more commonly it's been fourth or fifth and has reached as high as second place in 2020. Perhaps last year's slight dip reflected the loss of experienced winemaker Cyril Brun to Ferrari in northern Italy. It's been a difficult time for his replacement, Eloise Losfelt, as she has been out of the business for much of her first two years at the helm.

Replacing the well-known Brun and joining at a time when EPI – having successfully redefined Charles position in the market more at the level of the brands that now surround it in the MACB ratings – also seeks to increase the volume produced in line with expected growth of the revalued brand, was always going to be a tricky time to take charge in any case.

Any such expansion of volume always raises fears that quality and/or the ageing of the wine, will suffer during this phase. It's great, therefore, to be able to report that, having very recently tasted the entire current range of Charles at UK agents Liberty in mid-January, that clearly hasn't happened. The wines, most importantly the Brut Réserve, which is currently based on the 2019 harvest and so has enjoyed well over four years in bottle, has the lovely palate richness and creamy texture that time really helps deliver.

I'd still like to see a more detailed disgorgement date on the back label, which showed at what point in 2024 it was disgorged. The actual day, month, even the quarter, would be good to know for those discerning consumers Charles clearly has, that may use this valuable information to decide when to drink any given bottle. Why pay the extra money you



now have to, given the new higher price point, if you are not going to wait for at least 12 months post-disgorgement age before you open the wine, in order to see it at its glorious best?

And historically, under the late and great former cellar master Daniel Thibault back in the mid-1980s, money was poured

**“I'D STILL LIKE TO SEE A MORE DETAILED DISGORGEMENT DATE ON THE BACK LABEL”**

into the brand by the far-sighted André Hériard-Dubreuil, of Rémy Cointreau, to build up large quantities of reserve wine and to enable him to hold back releasing his Charles Mis en Cave Brut, with lots of reserve wine in the blend and extra ageing, until it did show gloriously.

**MARKET SLOWDOWN** Piper does it with great clarity on its excellent Essentiel wines, so why not Charles? Surely the time is now right to do so, with the overall market slowdown helping the extra ageing of the wines, and one assumes, growing the volume produced further still with weaker demand, no longer a priority. Though this is unconfirmed speculation on my part.

It is interesting to see that in terms of the price positioning, the Rosé Réserve – also '19 based but disgorged in 2023 and showing very impressively, is now nearly £15 a bottle more expensive than the Brut Réserve, while the gap between Brut Réserve and the Blanc de Blancs NV is now close on £20.

The quality is certainly there in these three multi-vintage cuvées, but that price differential is quite steep, and I'd personally opt for the Brut Réserve when it's singing, as it is currently, out of the three cuvées. Charles is no longer the standout bargain of 15 years ago, pre-EPI.

Perhaps we should just be grateful that EPI has really sought to retain, even advance, quality at Charles and has given the management team, led by Stephen Leroux, the time and the tools to do this. Tweaks that Brun gave the Charles Brut Rosé, after years working on the Veuve Clicquot rosé blends with Dominique Demarville, have born fruit (literally) and the '19 harvest-based wine tasted in January looks all the better knitted together for being 2023 disgorged.

The current 2013 vintage is looking very good indeed and the release of magnums is something to be looked forward to when the quality is bottle is already so impressive. After 2013 the vintage jumps to 2018 which is the first vintage Charles made by Brun, who won't of course be around to launch it. Presumably with '14, '15 and '16, EPI was still concentrating its efforts behind the BSA offering from Charles and 2017 didn't make the cut. The 2018, first of a potentially great trilogy of warm harvest wines, should be impressive when it hits the market this spring.

At the pinnacle of Charles production, the quality, intensity and complexity of the 2014 Blanc des Millénaires does suggest we have missed out on a straight vintage from that harvest and it's a wine with a long future ahead of it. 🌿





Champagne Blanc de Blancs



**EXPLORING DEPTH**

THE CRAYÈRES,  
OUR 2000-YEAR-OLD GALLO-ROMAN CELLARS  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LJUBODRAG ANDRIC

CHAMPAGNE  
**CHARLES  
HEIDSIECK**



# 6 POL ROGER

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Pol Roger continues to sit comfortably in the top 10 standings of the Most Admired brands it has never left in the entire 11 years we have run the survey. More often than not, it's been in the top five and it remains the only marque outside Roederer, Bollinger and Krug to have topped the winner's podium. It's a house that real lovers of champagne want to visit – it oozes old-school charm, the family connection here is very strongly felt and there's a tangible link to the past with more of the next, sixth generation, family members joining the business since 2020.

Last year was a memorable one for Pol, with the completion of the final part of a fundamental restructuring of the business. This involved the refurbishment of every aspect of the premises based in the heart of Epernay over the past two decades. Its premises in Avenue de Champagne, famously described by Sir Winston Churchill as "the world's most drinkable address" was

officially reopened in April last year. It was all done in time to celebrate Pol's 175th anniversary, plus the 150th anniversary of the birth of Churchill, its most famous customer.

The historic connection with Churchill was also marked last July with the unveiling in the grounds of a bronze statue of the great man, by his grandson Lord Soames, Randolph Churchill, his great grandson and Hubert de Billy, from the fifth generation of the Pol Roger family. The statue was created by British sculptor Paul Rafferty who depicts him painting at his easel, cigar in hand with an ice bucket at his feet containing his favourite Pol vintage of 1928.

To crown what has already been a memorable year for the house, the renewal of the Royal Warrant from King Charles 111 came on 19 December. Given the fact that Pol has been supplied, in magnum, for at least two royal weddings, most recently for that of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle, but also when Harry's brother walked up the aisle a few years earlier, this was not really a shock. But it is another great endorsement for the brand.

The refurbishment sensibly started – given that Pol is all about what's in the bottle, it's not marketing led – with work enlarging the winery and installing new stainless-steel vats and that important initial stage was completed in 2004.

## CONSTRUCTION

Having decided it couldn't easily leave its centrally located Epernay premises, given all the associated family history there, construction work on new disgorgement, packaging and labelling facilities began in 2020. Covid, of course, set the schedule for this work back significantly, but now with all these changes completed and a state-of-the-art winery easing all the production processes, Pol is well placed to concentrate on making its fine range of wines.

The famed 'white foil' Brut that was first introduced some 70 years ago in 1955, "to keep pace with a champagne market that was consuming younger wines", is a three-way blend that accurately reflects the appellation's vineyard plantings and in magnum, with

some extra ageing, shows its considerable class.

Pol is to be congratulated, perhaps even venerated, for the emphasis it continues to put on vintage champagne, which still represents around a quarter of the company's business, compared to the region's average which is more like 8%.

Some other houses have downplayed the vintage sector in favour of their prestige cuvée lines and, to a certain extent, upmarket non-vintage Blanc de Blancs, often priced at a similar level to vintage offerings, but rarely offering the same depth, complexity or ageing potential. Both Pol's Blanc de Blancs offering – which is a hidden star wine in the range and readily takes to long ageing – and its only pink champagne are both vintaged.

While newfangled ideas have historically been more difficult to gain the family ownership's agreement on, significant steps have been made under Laurent d'Harcourt's discreet leadership which now stretches into his second decade. Disgorgement dates on labels are now a welcome feature. It was interesting to taste Pure, the non-dosée cuvée which was launched back in 2007 and which I haven't tried for some years, at an anniversary tasting last October, where it showed notably well.

At a time when many of its competitive set, including Roederer, Bollinger and Billecart-Salmon, have introduced some twist on, or addition to, their Brut sans Année offering, perhaps this is a trick, to draw more attention that Pol is missing out on.

However, tasting together magnums of vintages from 2012, 2015 and the current 2018, makes you realise what Pol's USP really is. And looking around the room at all the MWs who somehow found time in their busy schedule to be there, shows the great affection in which Pol is still held. Long may it be so.



"THE FAMILY CONNECTION HERE IS VERY STRONGLY FELT"





# Ruinart

LA PLUS ANCIENNE MAISON  
DE CHAMPAGNE

BORN FROM NATURE,  
ELEVATED OVER TIME

DOM RUINART,  
THE QUINTESSENTIAL  
BLANC DE BLANCS





## 7 RUINART

[RUINART.COM](http://RUINART.COM)

Up one place on last year, it has been a while since Ruinart topped Dom Pérignon in the Most Admired rankings. This will no doubt delight the two Frédéric's, chief executive Dufour and head winemaker Panaïotis, who between them have cleverly developed

Ruinart's reputation.

Like chef du cave Vincent Chaperon at DP, Panaïotis has come up with his own unique take on what to do about the warming climate in the shape of his Blanc Singulier 'vintage'-based release.

As Panaïotis says, this too is "the result of reflection starting in 2015 and was designed as a witness to the climatic variations that we observe each year in the vines".

This new wine also falls into the luxury category of limited-

**"THE PERPETUAL RESERVE (PR), ONLY CREATED IN 2017, HOLDS THE KEY TO HELPING PRESERVE FRESHNESS"**

edition Brut sans Années, as made in recent years by Bollinger, Billecart-Salmon and Roederer, to name but three, and following in the footsteps of Jacquesson and its Cuvée 700 series.

While the second 2018-based wine was only available in the on-trade in France and the US, the third blend of Blanc Singulier Edition 19 has come to the UK market with the front label boldly stating its USP: "A singular expression of Chardonnay, revealed by a changing climate." It also reveals the wine is 77% 2019 based with 23% from the perpetual reserve and no dosage. Ruinart doesn't have DP's problem of this wine needing to be 100% vintage based. It has a disgorgement date on the back label too, another new departure for Ruinart.

The perpetual reserve (PR), only created in 2017, holds the key to helping preserve freshness (everyone is trying to do that now in Champagne) and in this version the portion increases from the 20% used in SE18. Half the PR has been oak aged, and this helps give it textural complexity too. Northern Montagne de Reims crus Sillery and Taïssay are key sources of Chardonnay. We understand '20 and '22-based blends will follow, but no '21 or '23, so by the time the 'fresher' '24 base comes along the PR will offer a good deal more complexity.



## 8



## 8 DOM PÉRIGNON

[DOMPERIGNON.COM](http://DOMPERIGNON.COM)

Dom Pérignon's strategy of trying to make a vintage wine from every single harvest has put it at the forefront of the battle to combat the changing climate. As it can't employ reserve wines to adjust any given harvest's deficiencies, chef de cave Vincent Chaperon is overseeing a radical change in the production model.

Speaking at the launch of the 2015 vintage of Dom Pérignon last July, he said weather extremes of recent harvests has dictated the need for a new, highly flexible and adaptable approach in the vineyard throughout the year. Particularly in terms of selecting the precise picking date for individual plots used in its elaboration.

"With access to 900ha of premier and grand cru vineyards, we have the possibility of selection which, in a year like 2015, where a vegetal character and phenolic aggressiveness can be a problem, is very important. Today you have to be in the vineyard tasting grapes. You have to go back earlier in the cycle looking at all the factors that affect the material you get to blend with. It's very important, especially in dry, hot years like 2015, to help you select precise dates when to pick any particular plot."

He is also "changing the way we taste still wines. We are stopping smelling but go instead straight to the palate. The wine's texture has become the most important factor, how the wine touches the palate". He calls this 'tactivity' and the tasting team are now looking at the touch, shape, volume (wide or thin), suppleness, weight (light or heavy) and grain in the mouth (silky or velvet) in their analysis.

With extra time on the lees and longer post-disgorgement ageing, he describes the 2015 as a wine of "authority, generosity and sucrosity", thanks to the ripe fruit; open and exuberant with an intense, developed mid-palate. "There's more dry extract and tannins, you can feel that. The phenolics have taken over the role of providing freshness and vibrancy," he notes. "It's less about acidity in Champagne today".





VINTAGE 2015

UNWAVERING PRESENCE

*Dom Pérignon*

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## 9 TAITTINGER

[TAITTINGER.COM](http://TAITTINGER.COM)

Members of the Most Admired voting panel like family run businesses in Champagne, especially those where the family name involved appears on the label. It's a powerful, tangible connection with the past. And at Taittinger, the next generation in the shape of Vitalie, who has headed up the business since 2019 along with her brother Clovis, are very much involved.

Last year was significant for the family and house with the reopening in July of the historic Saint-Nicaise visitor centre and cellars which had been closed for nearly two years of renovation. With its Unesco World Heritage listing it attracts thousands of visitors each year to see the remains of the 13th century Saint-Nicaise abbey and the 14th century

Gallo-Roman chalk pits – some of the most impressive in Reims – along with the nearby Ruinart, Pommery and Clicquot cellars.

The bedrock on which the family business is built remains the 288ha vineyard estate, the third largest in the appellation (bigger than both Bollinger and Roederer, though Taittinger makes a lot more wine and its vineyard supplies around half its needs). It was largely compiled in the sixties by Claude Taittinger during his tenure at the helm. He even had the foresight to buy large parcels of vineyard land in the Côte des Bar when other négociants based in and around Reims and Epernay, still mistakenly viewed Champagne's southerly vineyards as inferior.

Some 37% of this estate is planted with Chardonnay and



a good chunk of these 100-plus hectares – enough to elaborate 1 million bottles of champagne – is in top crus of the Côte des Blancs. Chardonnay is important in all the Taittinger blends, accounting for around 40% of the Brut Réserve

and half the vintage cuvée, which can age very well. Its starring role, however, is in Comtes de Champagne, a five-way grand cru blend that can easily age three decades, as I hope my bottle of '95 will reveal later this year.



## 10 SALON

[CHAMPAGNE-SALON.FR](http://CHAMPAGNE-SALON.FR)

One well-known UK website specialising in Champagne describes Salon as Champagne's "finest and rarest Blanc de Blancs" and it lists the previous 2012 vintage of said wine for a mere £960 a bottle. On the same site you could buy a six-bottle a case of Comtes de Champagne 2013, the current very fine release, and have near £100 spare.

I know how I would spend my money, but that's not the point. If rarity alone is what attracts you, maybe Salon is for you, but from the same Le Mesnil grand cru in the Côte des Blancs, grower Pierre Péters may provide more vinous excitement and just think how many magnums of Le Mesnil £960 would buy you.

There is little doubt Salon's cult status has been fuelled by its rarity. The marketing, deliberately, leans heavily on the idea that Salon is only produced in 'exceptional' years. However, we now live in an age when, thanks to a warming climate, champagne houses can reliably produce fine, even outstanding, vintage wines almost every year, like Dom Pérignon strives to.

Originally, 2012 Salon wasn't deemed good enough or suitable enough to release, though it is true that Dom Ruinart didn't make 2012 because chef du cave Frédéric Panaïotis didn't think the Chardonnay up to scratch. Now the 2013 vintage of Salon – arguably the freshest most recent vintage in Champagne prior to 2024 – is on the market for an even more eye-watering £1,250 a bottle or more. Surely a mistake to put in such a giant price hike just as the fine wine market is doing a dive?

Looking ahead, what is Salon going to do with the very warm years that soon follow in 2015, '18, '19 and '20? Perhaps it will remember that '64 and '76, two of the warmest vintages ever in Champagne, are two of its best – they are certainly two of the finest Salons I have ever tasted. So maybe we will see an 18-20 trilogy, just sold in magnum. Salon aficionados, and I believe there are several, had better start saving up.



L'INSTANT TAITTINGER

PHOTO BY DAVID BLACK



CHAMPAGNE  
**TAITTINGER**

REIMS FRANCE



## 11 GOSSET

[CHAMPAGNE-GOSSET.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-GOSSET.COM)

There aren't many more traditional producers than Gosset, which is the oldest wine house in Champagne, founded in Ay back in 1584, at a time when the region was a centre for red wine production. So it's great to see the brand, re-establish itself in

the higher echelons of the Most Admired standings.

Gosset in one of a relatively small band of producers that typically eschew malolactic fermentation of its wines right across the range, as freshness, plus a long period of maturation, are two of the main attributes that set its wines apart.

Stylistically, this also makes sense of the brand positioning, which very much leans towards the top end of the

**"WITH THE WARMING CLIMATE IN CHAMPAGNE, PRESERVING FRESHNESS IS BECOMING VERY IMPORTANT"**

on-trade and leading restaurants in particular.

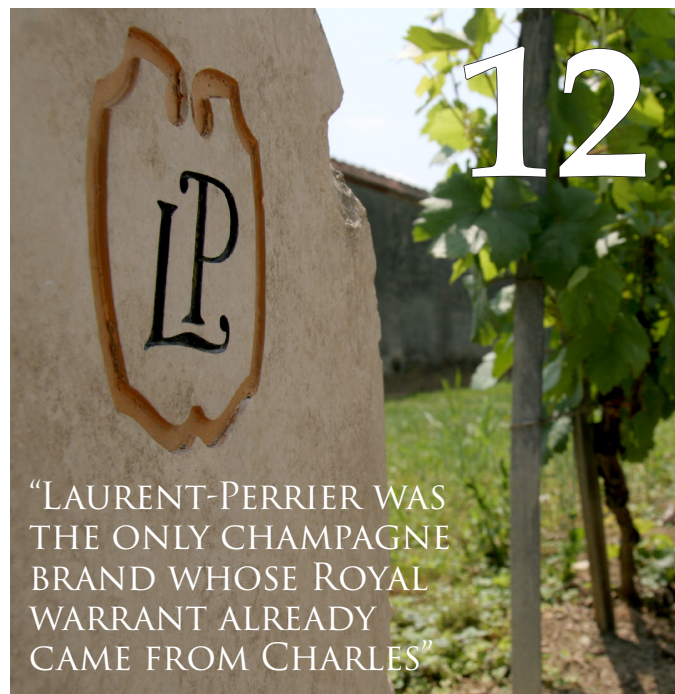
With the warming climate in Champagne, preserving freshness is becoming a very important part of everyone's winemaking skill set. Experienced practitioners such as Odilon de Varine, Gosset's chef de cave of nearly 10 years standing, and people like Hervé Dantan at Lanson, are ahead of the game.

Gosset has also developed its Brut sans Année range of wines, in line with that trend in champagne, but in its own very particular way with some small production, longer matured wines.

There is the 12 Ans de Cave à Minima, more recently the 12 Ans de Cave à Minima Rosé and new last year, following on from the 15 Ans de Cave Brut style, came 21-year-aged Extra Brut style bottled in the summer of 2001.

It was interesting hearing from Odilon de Varine in the middle of the 2023 harvest that, while people still widely see Gosset as a Pinot Noir-dominant house, in his search for freshness he is regularly incorporating more Chardonnay into his blends.

The 21-year-aged wine and, perhaps more surprisingly, the rosé both have more Chardonnay than Pinot Noir, the former being 57% Chardonnay to 43% Pinot and the latter 65% Chardonnay to 35% Pinot Noir, though 8% red wine in this blend does bring the cherry, lifted fruit to the fore.



**"LAURENT-PERRIER WAS THE ONLY CHAMPAGNE BRAND WHOSE ROYAL WARRANT ALREADY CAME FROM CHARLES"**

## 12 LAURENT-PERRIER

[LAURENT-PERRIER.COM](http://LAURENT-PERRIER.COM)

Last year when all the champagne houses with a Royal Warrant granted by Queen Elizabeth II were nervously wondering if they would maintain it under the reign of King Charles III, Laurent-Perrier could afford to be rather more relaxed than most. It was the only champagne brand whose warrant already came from Charles, as it was bestowed by the then Prince of Wales back in 1998. And in May last year it was the first to learn of its success in keeping the patronage of Britain's royal family, justification for a celebratory dinner at St James's Palace last summer.

Guests were treated on arrival to what for many was their first taste of Laurent-Perrier's new multi-vintage prestige line, Héritage, a kind of 'junior' Grande Siècle, which is entirely made up of reserve wines. In this first assemblage, it comes from four vintages – 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2019 – with the two younger wines accounting for 30% of the blend each, while the two older wines each provide 20%.

In contrast, the current blend of Grand Siècle, iteration No 26, is a blend of three different harvests in descending proportions from youngest to oldest. So here there's 65% of 2012, 25% of 2008 and 10% of 2007, a pretty smart selection of harvests, which certainly partly accounts for the quality of this particular blend. In terms of grape varieties, the blend of Héritage is similar with slightly more Chardonnay (55% to 45% Pinot Noir), but it comes from as many as 40 different crus while Grand Siècle is pure grand cru sourced from up to 11 villages, though there are only eight used in this version.

Laurent-Perrier is probably better known for its NV rosé than its straight vintage releases, though as Grande Siècle suggests, these can age remarkably well. A bottle of 1996 from my cellar was remarkably complex, with lovely tertiary aromas of maturity, that very few '96s display today. The 2015 release looks to be a very decent example of this hot, dry year.



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## 13 PHILIPPONNAT

[PHILIPPONNAT.COM](http://PHILIPPONNAT.COM)

Since jumping up the Most Admired ranking in 2023 – its 500th anniversary year – Philipponnat hasn't looked back. It may not quite qualify as a 'family-owned' business, in that it's part of the Lanson BCC group set up a few years back by Bruno Paillard, but it is run today by Charles Philipponnat whose family can trace their heritage in this central part of the Champagne vineyard back to the 16th century.

The Philipponnats have been associated with Aÿ, in effect the vinous capital of Champagne, and adjacent village Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, where the house is based today, since 1522. Charles, who has been head of the house since 2001, can trace his ancestors back 15 generations. And today his son François also works in the business.

In 1522, Avril Le Philipponnat, a Swiss captain in the service of King Francis I, living in Aÿ since the end of the fifth Italian War, already owned property in the locality called Le Léon in Aÿ. The house still owns vines there from which Philipponnat, a champion of Pinot Noir and Blanc de Noirs styles in particular, makes a single cru (Aÿ) vintage wine today. Back in September, I had the chance to taste the latest Le Léon 2015 vintage, (only 2006 and '14 have been made previously) along with La Rémissonne 2015, its Mareuil single vineyard counterpart. What a treat – more than a hint of Burgundy here.

Both are entirely vinified in oak casks without going through malolactic fermentation. The Mareuil wine "comes from a single plot next to Clos des Goisses, facing south and south west but the soil here is deeper", says Charles. "There's a little more clay, which gives the extra roundness to the wine, while the whole of Clos des Goisses is on [pure] chalk."

The Le Léon plot in Aÿ is based on "much chalkier soils, with steeper slopes and less topsoil, resulting in more minerality with a spicy purity giving notes of ginger and red pepper". Both great wines for the table.

## 14 RARE

[RARE-CHAMPAGNE.COM](http://RARE-CHAMPAGNE.COM)

This is probably the youngest marque in contention for a top 10 place in the Most Admired survey, in that it only became a stand-alone brand this decade. It was created by Régis Camus with the super sunny ripe 1976 harvest, in effect as a celebration of that special year. We didn't know then that warm, sunny harvests were going to be a far more regular feature of the Champagne climate.

Camus retired in 2022 and which harvests to vinify for this prestige line is now decided by Émilien Boutillat, also the winemaker for the separate Piper Heidsieck range of wines, where he's been in charge for seven years. With Rare he's already had the pleasure of presenting the 2013 vintage, launched in June 2023 and over 12

months later in September 2024, he talked me through the next released 2012 wine, which, due to a mix-up, I was able to taste side by side with its predecessor. This was appropriate as it turns out, because tasting the two wines side by side in their cellars was precisely how they came to the slightly counter-intuitive decision to put the two wines on the market out of sequence.

I say counter-intuitive because, as a late harvest wine from a coolish year, when picking only started in late September, most of the excellent '13s launched have displayed a notable freshness and tightness.

Boutillat, explaining the logic of this move, says: "we made several tastings of 2013 and 2012 side by side and there's no doubt these are two amazing wines. But with

"WE DIDN'T KNOW THEN THAT WARM, SUNNY HARVESTS WERE GOING TO BE A FAR MORE REGULAR FEATURE OF THE CHAMPAGNE CLIMATE"

14



2012, we felt we had something else, another dimension that reminded us of the spirit of the 2002 vintage. It displays a balance that marks it out and suggests a very long ageing potential." While '13 is good they

think '12 is even better. Tasting them again together, at the January Liberty tasting I can concur. The 2013 may be dazzling, but the '12 has it in terms of depth, intensity and complexity.



*Rare*  
CHAMPAGNE



RARE MILLÉSIME 2012  
**ODE TO JOY**

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[www.rare-champagne.com](http://www.rare-champagne.com)

PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY





## 15 JACQUESSON

[CHAMPAGNEJACQUESSON.COM](http://CHAMPAGNEJACQUESSON.COM)

It's hard to believe but this year, with the launch of Cuvée 748, based principally on the 2020 harvest, it's now 20 years since the Chiquet brothers, Laurent and Jean-Hervé, changed the way they created their principal Brut sans Année style. This was a significant step, moving away from Brut sans Années of 'dull' consistency to make something more accurately and excitingly, reflecting the inherent qualities of every given harvest. It has since been picked up and adopted in some form by quite a few of the leading houses in the appellation.

Today the Chiquets' main involvement is in supplying grapes to new owner Artémis Domaines, specifically to Jean Garandeau, Jacquesson's managing director since September 2022. With all the trials and tribulations of recent harvests, especially 2024, it must have been a great help to be able to call on their expertise.

The Cuvée 748 blend is close to that used with the 2016 base, being 55% Pinot Noir from vineyards in Aÿ, Dizy the nearest to the house, Hautvillers and Champillon set against 45% Chardonnay from Avize and Oiry. Reserve wines in the blend include material from the five previous such blends – 747 back to 743, plus some 741. Finished with an Extra Brut dosage of just 2gm/l.

With yields in 2020 capped at 8,000kg/ha by the CIVC committee panicking in the face of Covid-19, production was down slightly on the 2019-based Cuvée 747 blend at 170,320 bottles, 8,850 magnums and 400 jeroboams. There's no evidence to support any thoughts that production will be ramped up under the new regime.

At the outset Garandeau sees the Chardonnay element being dominant in the 2020 blend, whereas for the current Dégorgement Tardif Cuvée 743, based on the ripe, sunny, dry 2015 harvest Pinot Noir, is more to the fore. The Champenois should quickly realise this is a serious operation and Jacquesson wine quality will remain impressively high. Tasting Cuvée 748 is a pleasure I look forward to.

## 16 VEUVE CLICQUOT

[VEUVECLICQUOT.COM](http://VEUVECLICQUOT.COM)

It was a great to visit this famous Reims house last summer and catch up again with winemaker Didier Mariotti. At Clicquot, you know that great past vintages will come out at some point – it is generous in sharing.

This trip didn't disappoint on that front, with Emmanuel Gouvernet from Mariotti's 12-strong winemaking team guiding us through a detailed technical tasting. We started with a selection of different 2023 vins clairs, such as a pinkish Pinot Noir from a Verzy plot used for La Grande Dame; a Chardonnay preblend from Le Mesnil and Avize, plus some reserve wines they put in three categories. Category 1 are one to three years old, aged in stainless steel, plus 1% in 50-70hl oak casks. Category 2 are from four to 10 years, mature reserve wines showing notes of "dry fruits, bit of honey, pastry, brioche, we add about 25% of these to the NV".

Category 3 are reserve wines "spices", like a top chef might use to lift a dish, where just

3-4% in a blend has influence. We tried Chouilly and Cramant Chardonnay from 1988 and 1990, respectively.

Our palates set, we launched into La Grande Dame 2015 white and rosé, where the Pinot Noir portion has grown to 90% and the Chardonnay is that Avize/Le Mesnil blend. Next came the 2012 LGD with the striking black dot Yayoi Kusama label – superb. We jumped back to LGD 1998 in magnum, at this point it was still a 60/40 Noir/Chardonnay blend with honey, butter and orange zest notes, plus dried figs for Gouvernet. Then we were reminded of how great Clicquot's Cave Privée older vintage releases are, with a magnum of 1982.

With Mariotti at dinner we started with 2006, memorably consumed years earlier at a Joel Robuchon lunch in the same Hôtel du Marc dining room. LGD Rosé 2008 and LGD 1990 white, all in magnum followed, with Clicquot 1979 Rosé a fitting conclusion. An excellent reminder of the top quality.



"AT CLICQUOT, YOU KNOW THAT GREAT PAST VINTAGES WILL COME OUT AT SOME POINT"



## 17 PERRIER-JOUËT

PERRIER-JOUËT.COM

Head winemaker Séverine Frerson continues to make waves with innovations. The latest and most radical involves the completion of the restoration of the 19th-century barrel cellar at the winery in the Avenue de Champagne, installing fine-grained French barrels and foudres from three different sources which came into use first with the 2024 harvest.

Oak hasn't been used for vinification at Perrier-Jouët since 1990. The new cellar will be entirely devoted to PJ's signature variety Chardonnay and is designed to allow separate fermentations of individual plots, which are now farmed according to regenerative viticulture. The Pinot Noir thus farmed will also be vinified separately, on

a plot-by-plot basis, in small, stainless steel tanks. Frerson will have a greatly increased palate of materials to blend from this year.

I tasted some micro-production 2023 vins clairs from the regenerative plots, the first that had been vinified separately, with Frerson in March last year. It was exciting to see the expressive energy of the wines, plus the marked differences in flavour profile depending on soil profiles of the plots and the regenerative planting regime used. These vary depending on the assessed needs of soil types, location and aspect.

We tried wines she had made from two types of cover crop, broadly speaking flowers and biomass, in their vineyards in Avize and the differences are

marked. She characterises the biomass cover vins clairs as "more intense with greater power, more 'shoulders' and spiciness" while the flower cover crop gives "more delicacy and freshness". With 20ha already farmed regeneratively in Perrier-Jouët's estate and supplier growers being encouraged to adopt similar practices, it will be fascinating to see how the wines develop and change. Some oak vinification introduces another range of textural possibilities.

The Belle Époque trilogy of 2014, 2015 and 2016 made by her predecessor tasted together recently at the Champagne Show already impress, but Frerson clearly intends to go further and introduce more nuances of texture and flavour to the wines.



"WINES LIKE THIS COULD BE THE FUTURE OF CHAMPAGNE GIVEN GLOBAL WARMING"



CHAMPAGNE  
DRAPPIER

MAISON À URVILLE  
CAVES À REIMS

18

## 18 DRAPPIER

CHAMPAGNE-DRAPPIER.COM

The Drappiers retain the accolade of being the highest placed, smaller, family run business in our annual survey. Michel Drappier must be a very proud man with his father still on hand to dispense knowledge in his 99th year, his three children taking ever-larger roles in running the business, and several grandchildren too.

I visited the Urville base in September, too late to see any harvesting as the Côte des Bar again bore the brunt of bad weather in Champagne, with more rain than anywhere else, plus severe frosts cutting potential yields at the outset. Hugo Drappier says the three nights of frost in April (21-23) wiped out about 60-70% of the entire crop.

However, with lots of high-quality reserve wine in stock, an exciting and large range of cuvées being made – 25 currently thanks to Hugo's experiments – plus plans for a new cellar at an advanced stage, everyone there is looking forward in a positive way.

Tastings over two days confirmed the wines are on terrific form and surely the gradual conversion of all Drappier's vineyards to organic farming must be an influence here. By 2024 harvest its entire vineyard estate of 62ha was certified organic.

Hugo led us through wines including Rosé Brut Nature plus the new Rosé sourced in Les Riceys, both showing the very high quality of their pinks. As his father Michel says: "When you close your eyes you must get that it's rosé from the aromas and the red fruit notes. You get that from maceration, no rosé we make is made by blending red and white wine. We think colour is less important than taste."

We then taste the amazing ancient varieties blends: Quattuor Blanc de Quatre Blancs made up of equal portions of Arbanne, Petit Meslier, Blanc Vrai and Chardonnay. First the current 2019 vintage (though it's not labelled as a single vintage), alongside the original 2004-base first edition Hugo's father made. Wines like this could be the future of champagne given global warming, and passionate exponents like the Drappiers show such a future holds few fears.





CHAMPAGNE  
**DRAPPIER**

MAISON FAMILIALE DEPUIS 1808  
URVILLE - FRANCE





## 19 HENRI GIRAUD

[CHAMPAGNE-GIRAUD.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-GIRAUD.COM)

I hadn't been to see Henri Giraud in the grand cru village of Aÿ for nearly a decade, so it was good to return in September to catch up on recent developments – even staying in one of the luxury rooms at Manoir Henri Giraud, next door to the winery in central Aÿ, where prices start at around €490 a night.

The décor makes a feature of the same fine-grained Argonne Forest-sourced oak that's used for the barrels in which much of the Giraud champagne range is fermented and stored in the flooring, furniture and fittings for the rooms. Its luxury accommodation is in line with the positioning of the brand, where the vintage

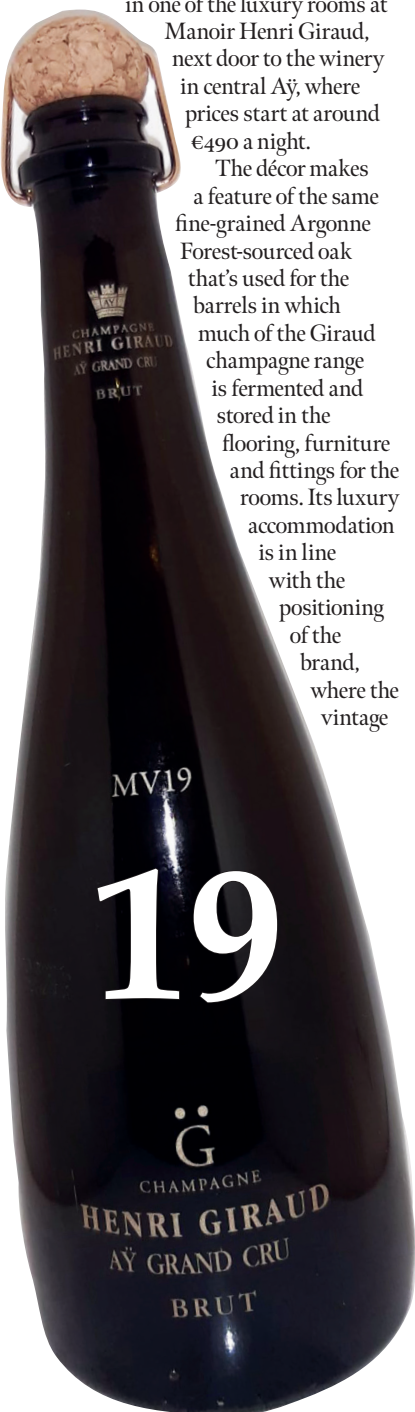
“FOR THE UNINITIATED, THE GOOD NEWS IS ITS ‘ENTRY LEVEL’ WINE, ESPRIT NATURE, RETAILS FOR UNDER £60”

offerings start at around the £170 a bottle mark.

However, for the uninitiated, the good news is its ‘entry level’ wine, Esprit Nature, retails for under £60 at The Whisky Exchange, where buyer Dawn Davies MW, who championed Giraud in her sojourn as buyer at Selfridges, remains a fan. For Davies, the Giraud wines “never fail to delight”. The Esprit blend has 80% Pinot Noir to 20% Chardonnay, plus 10% reserve wine from past vintages aged in oak, bringing a richness to the wine that gives it a vinous feel. As she says, the palate is more Burgundy than Champagne – these are really wines to go with food.

If you are staying chez Giraud, there's a great opportunity on site to try a selection of its cuvées matched with specific, imaginative dishes designed to help you see the different aspects of aroma, texture and flavour they offer.

MV19, its 2019 harvest-based 80/20 Pinot/Chardonnay blend that has 33% from the perpetual reserve dating back to 1990, is a hard-to-follow start point. We try Hommage au Pinot Noir, a powerful, savoury Blanc de Noir style, followed by Blanc de Craie – a floral-scented Blanc de Blancs style with yellow peach richness, about two-thirds sourced from Aÿ Chardonnay.



19

20

“SOME 25% OF THE BLEND WAS VINIFIED IN SMALL, USED OAK BARRELS, WHICH HAS ADDED SOME ATTRACTIVE TEXTURAL RICHNESS”

## 20 BRUNO PAILLARD

[CHAMPAGNEBRUNOPAILLARD.COM](http://CHAMPAGNEBRUNOPAILLARD.COM)

It's always delightful to meet up with Alice Paillard for the launch of one of Bruno Paillard's wines with other comparable cuvées to try, and often something to suggest how the wine will age over time. But also, in keeping with its position at the tables of many top Michelin-starred restaurants in France, the UK and further afield, such tastings tend to be done with a background of sumptuous food served.

The 2014 Blanc de Blancs, produced from a harvest where, for Paillard, Chardonnay is the winner and described as 'gourmand' on account of its generous style, was released in early summer. The majority of the blend, around 85%, is sourced in the heart of the Côte des Blancs in the grand cru villages of Oger and Mesnil-sur-Oger, while there's also a touch of Cramant and Chouilly.

Some 25% of the blend was vinified in small, used oak barrels, which has added some attractive textural richness. It's finished with a dosage of just 3gm/l and disgorged 18 months before release, in line with Paillard's admirable assertion that at least one year of post-disgorgement ageing is needed, the older the wine the longer the 'recovery' takes.

In October this was followed by Assemblage 2015 and a tasting rendezvous at Hide by Ollie Dabbous. This 58% Pinot Noir and 42% Chardonnay blend, made from a mix of six grand and premier cru sites, with a quarter vinified in oak, comes from the very warm and dry 2015 harvest, producing a structured wine of great power and density. Already impressive, this is built to age.

Mention should also be made of Nec Plus Ultra 2009, Paillard's luxury cuvée combining only six grand crus, entirely fermented in small oak barrels where it stays for the first 10 months. Disgorged in November 2022 with 4.5gm/l dosage with another 18 months rest before it goes on sale, it's still quite taut and fresh initially, only giving a hint of the layers of flavour and complexity that will unfold. A wine of contemplation.





DEUTZ

FONDÉ EN 1838

CHAMPAGNE

*Amour de Deutz*

BRUT

*Millésime 2013*

12% vol. PRODUIT DE FRANCE ELABORÉ PAR DEUTZ, A.Y. FRANCE. NM-179-006 750 ml





# 21

## 21 DEUTZ

[CHAMPAGNE-DEUTZ.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-DEUTZ.COM)

Researching for a piece on prestige lines that are more 'under the radar' at the Champagne Show in mid-November, I stopped at the Deutz stand to try the triumvirate of its luxury offering, which comprises Cuvée William Deutz, Amour de Deutz and Amour de Deutz Rosé. These were all from the fine 2013 harvest, the last time that grapes were largely picked in early October.

Grapes ripening more slowly in cooler temperatures in late September helps retain freshness, which seems to really suit the Deutz style, and they are exemplary examples of the high quality that '13 can yield. The William Deutz puts Pinot Noir from Aÿ vineyards just above the winery at the heart of this blend, supported by Bouzy, Ambonnay and Verzenay, and making up 77% of the blend. Chardonnay's 20%, in contrast, comes from Avize, Vertus, Chouilly and Villers-Marmery, plus 3% Meunier.

Two of the component parts of the Pinot Noir element – Meurtet and La Côte Glacière – have been very successfully shown as separate wines and I learned from managing director Marc Hoellinger, when visiting the house in December, there are plans to do more with a single plot wine of Meunier to follow soon.

With winemaker Caroline Latrive working closely with the vineyard team led by Cédric Georget, 2024 was the first year the whole 49ha Deutz estate was farmed organically. While they are very happy with the quality in 2024 of "exceptional Pinot Noir", "very promising Chardonnay" and a "nice surprise with very aromatic Meunier", because of frost, uneven flowering and downy mildew accentuated by the rain, yields under the new organic regime are down to 5,700kg/ha against the appellation's 10,000kg/ha limit. One other major change Hoellinger draws attention to is that they will now be getting advice from Roederer's Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, with his long experience of organic farming. Although Deutz is controlled by the Rouzaud family that owns Roederer, the two houses were run entirely separately before.

"2024 WAS THE FIRST YEAR THE WHOLE 49HA DEUTZ ESTATE WAS FARMED ORGANICALLY"

## 22 HENRIOT

[CHAMPAGNE-HENRIOT.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-HENRIOT.COM)

Former Vinexpo chief and now managing director of Champagne Henriot, Guillaume Deglise, was in London for the launch of Henriot's 2018 L'Inattendue at Los Mochis London City rooftop bar, on bonfire night. It was the first big event for the Henriot brand in the UK under the new ownership of Terroirs & Vignerons de Champagne (TEVC) the largest cooperative group in Champagne, which also markets the Nicolas Feuillatte, Castelnau and Abelé brands. It was a great opportunity to show the trade the whole impressive Henriot range, bar Cuvée 38 (the Finest Bubble has the sixth edition for £598 a magnum) which comes solely from a grand cru Chardonnay solera and is only available in magnum.

L'Inattendue 2018 is like its predecessor, a pure Blanc de Blancs grand cru, this time from Chouilly (the 2016 release came from four plots in Avize). This was the first of three notable sunny years in Champagne, with more than 750 hours of sunshine between April and June, compared with the seasonal average for those three months of 630 hours. It was also the earliest harvest start ever. Unsurprisingly the wine has a generous, invite-you-in aroma of ripe, even exotic, fruit with a velvety texture while retaining an attractive fresh finish.

The event kicked off with magnums of Brut Souverain. With some extra age and the larger format, this superior BSA blend with a large 40% slice of

Chardonnay and more than 40% reserve wine – including some from a perpetual reserve – was drinking beautifully and disappearing rapidly.

The evening also provided the chance to compare the very decent 2014 and 2013 vintages in the shape of Henriot's straight vintage, the former, and prestige line Hemera the latter, a 50/50 Chardonnay/Pinot Noir blend that's sourced in six grands crus, Verzy, Verzenay and Mailly for the Pinot Noir and Avize, Chouilly and Le Mesnil for Chardonnay. It showed lots of freshness and tension with a hint of smokiness, something that could easily be cellared for a decade more. The whole range looked on terrific form.



# 22





CHAMPAGNE  
**HENRIOT**  
MAISON FONDÉE EN 1808



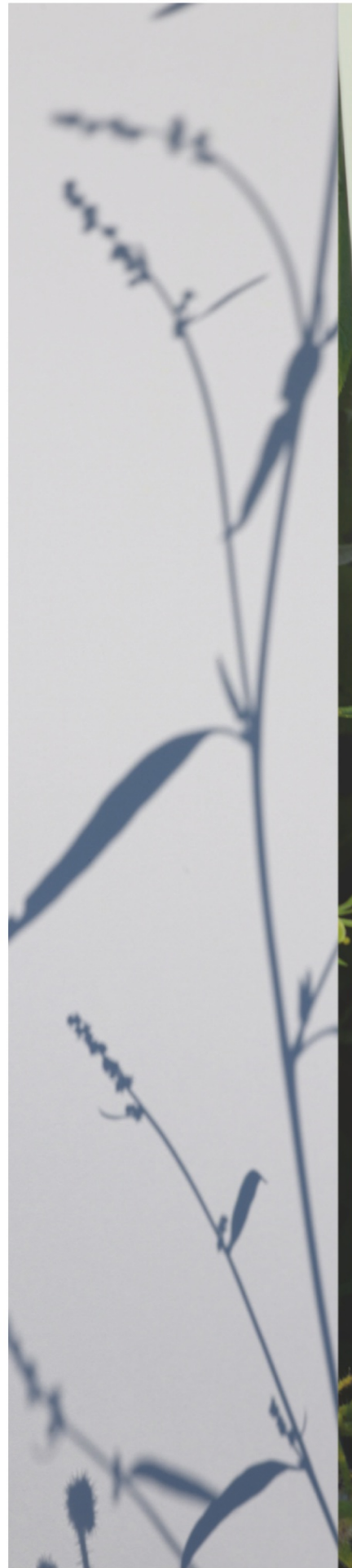
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PERRIER-JOUËT



CHAMPAGNE  
BRUT  
MAISON FONDÉE EN 1811

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-2016-  
À EPERNAY - FRANCE



“THE WORD HAS GRADUALLY BEEN GETTING OUT THAT THE WINES PALMER PRODUCES ARE CONSISTENTLY GOOD ACROSS THE RANGE”

23=

## 23= PALMER & CO

### CHAMPAGNE-PALMER.FR

Palmer has raised its game again and climbed to its highest-ever place in the Most Admired survey this year; the voting panel put it on a level with two of the appellation's leading brands in Moët and Lanson. The word has gradually been getting out that the wines Palmer produces are consistently good across the range, from the new look and more complex palate of La Réserve, its high class Brut sans Année offering, up to prestige line Amazone de Palmer, first created back in 1978.

That too had something of a reboot with the current three vintage blend on the market – 2012, 2010 and 2009 – bottled in 2013, being taken to another level by enriching it with a significant portion (18%) of a Chardonnay solera started over 30 years ago.

The 2019-based La Réserve, the second blend of this wine, tasted with most of the rest of the range in January, includes an increased 41% of reserve wine from 2018, '16 and '15, which appears to have made it richer and a touch more complex. The Brut Nature version of La Réserve on a '16 base has added complexity from the Chardonnay solera in the blend.

The Brut sans Année Blanc de Blancs, my introduction to the house nearly 30 years ago, is '18 based and has that sort of drinkability that sees it favoured as a by-the-glass offering in the many on-trade accounts stocking the brand.

Grands Terroirs, Palmer's tribute to the vineyards in its Montagne de Reims heartland, is now on the distinctive hot and dry 2015 vintage. The most important crus in the 50% Chardonnay that dominates the blend are the east-facing villages of Trépail and Villers-Mamery.

The Rosé Solera is currently 2021 based and is one of Palmer's success stories in accounts where other houses' rosés have become very expensive of late. It's very pale but the Pinot Noir from Les Riceys imparts a lot of flavour and aroma, with a nod to Burgundy barely any distance to the south.

## 23= MOËT & CHANDON

### MOËT.COM

Presenting the Moët Grand Vintage Trilogy tasting, including the new 2016, chef de cave Benoît Gouez, began with thoughts on the 2024 harvest, he sees as having certain similarities with 2016.

“The 2016 season was less dramatic, no one climatic element explains the profile. Another challenging year with two-and-a-half times average rainfall and huge disease pressure, mostly mildew. Again, we lost 20% or so of the crop. We were concerned about maturity at the start of September, but finally happy with the result and found there was room for creativity. With the 2013 vintage, the style was decided by weather, but in '15 and '16 there were lots of different profiles to play with; '16 is very much a 'winemaker's vintage'. I'd expect there to be a wider diversity of styles from different houses.”

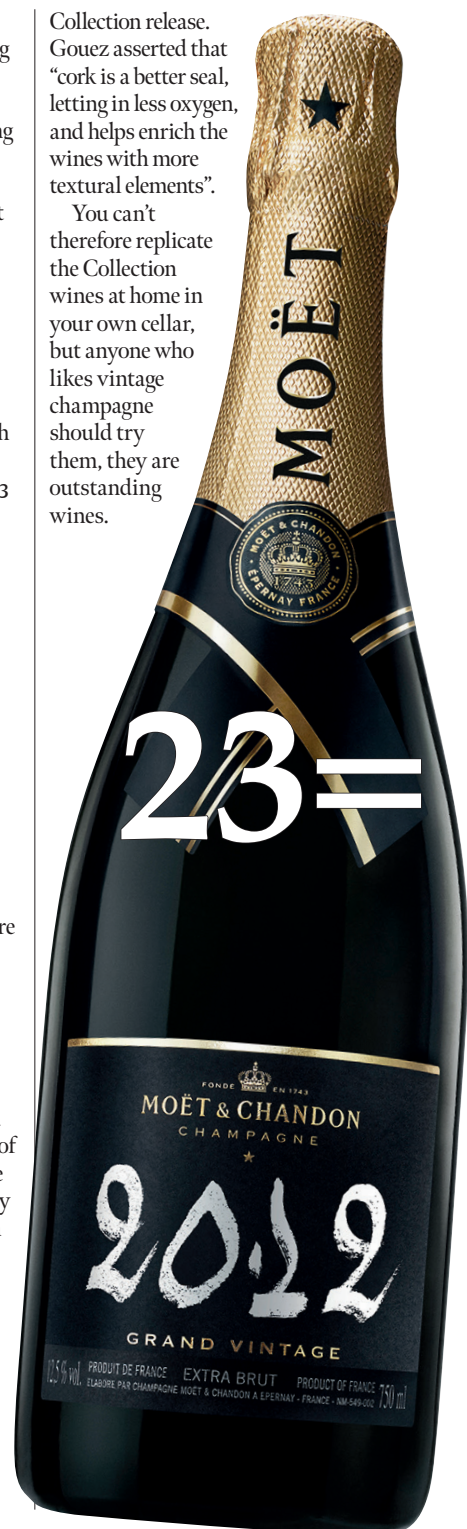
In our '16, “there's an equal balance between yeastiness and freshness. There's stoned fruit, peaches and apricot, with no reductive character. The palate is serene and seamless with a developed creamy texture and mouthfeel. While '13 is fresher, and '15 more structured, '16 is more balanced”. Disgorged in March 2023 he applauds the fact it has had 21 months on the cork and he thinks it's needed to show so impressively.

We tried Collection releases from 2009 and 2000. Gouez said three different vintages, but part of the same family. The '09 has gone nutty and toasty with some honey notes too. The 2000, disgorged in 2015, is astonishingly fresh and doesn't feel nine years older. It boasts a softer, butter richness, but the '09 does have a touch more length and complexity

Since 1993 Moët has done two bottlings of every vintage release, one under crown cap (the regular release) and a smaller batch under cork, kept back for the later

Collection release. Gouez asserted that “cork is a better seal, letting in less oxygen, and helps enrich the wines with more textural elements”.

You can't therefore replicate the Collection wines at home in your own cellar, but anyone who likes vintage champagne should try them, they are outstanding wines.





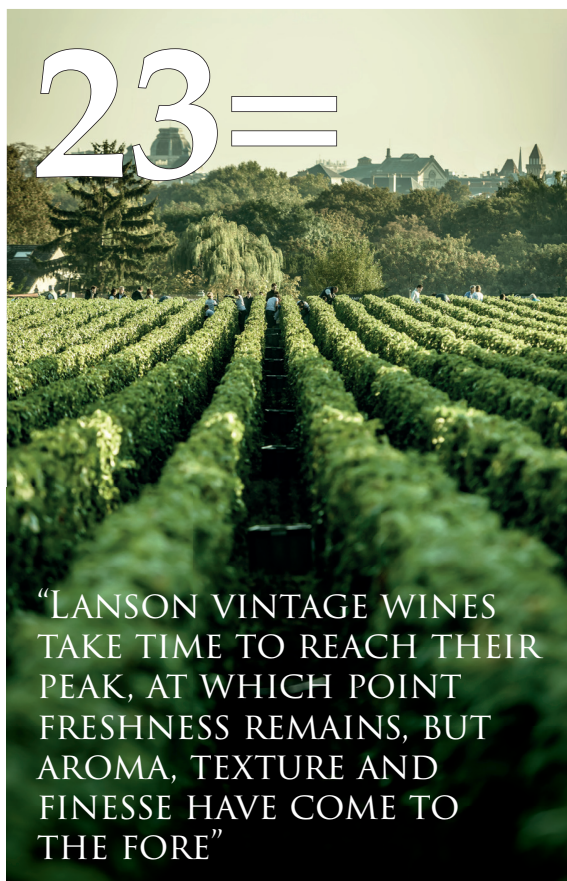
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MOËT & CHANDON  
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“LANSON VINTAGE WINES TAKE TIME TO REACH THEIR PEAK, AT WHICH POINT FRESHNESS REMAINS, BUT AROMA, TEXTURE AND FINESSE HAVE COME TO THE FORE”

## 23= LANSON

[LANSON.COM](http://LANSON.COM)

I've tasted quite a lot of different Lanson cuvées over the past six months and the first thing to say is that they have been universally good. At the highest level, over Christmas when some serious mature wines were opened chez Fallowfield, the 2004 Noble Blanc de Blancs was the standout.

Named Noble Cuvée up to the 2022 vintage, the blend for this wine has altered slightly from vintage to vintage – in 2000 it was just Avize and Cramant – but is more usually four or five grands crus villages in the Côte des Blancs, in this instance: Avize, Cramant, Oger, Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Chouilly.

Made without going through malolactic fermentation, the Lanson vintage wines, and Noble Blanc de Blancs in particular, take time to reach their peak, at which point freshness remains, but aroma, texture and finesse have come to the fore.

That's where the '04 Noble sits now and I note you can still buy a single bottle on the Finest Bubble website for £118, which makes it probably the fine Champagne bargain of the moment.

I haven't tasted Lanson 2013 vintage, a 53% Pinot to 47% Chardonnay blend, sourced from seven grands crus and three premiers, since August last year, but was immediately struck by it as one of the best examples of this late harvest, with the signature lively freshness of the year, but much more in terms of textural complexity and likely to get better still. I rather rashly gave a second bottle to a friend.

While Lanson's vintage offering has always been good, Hervé Dantan has revolutionised the quality of the rest of the range since joining in 2013, becoming chef de cave in 2015.

Wines such as the new style Blanc de Blancs Dantan created and I first tasted with him before launch back in December 2019, are great additions to the Lanson range.

## 26 VEUVE-FOURNY

[CHAMPAGNE-VEUVE-FOURNY.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-VEUVE-FOURNY.COM)

Along with Champagne Drappier, Veuve Fourny is the other smallest, family-run quality producer featuring regularly in the Most Admired Champagne report. It's run by the charming Fourny brothers, Charles-Henry and Emmanuel, who are fifth-generation Champenois, from a family that has been tending vines in the top premier cru of Vertus, that sits towards the southern end of the Côte des Blancs, since 1856.

Vertus is the second-largest cru in the Champagne appellation and covers over 530ha of ground. It's not one single entity, stretching as it does right up to Le Mesnil-sur-Oger to the north, but a series of different terroirs with different soil types and aspects.

Veuve-Fourny owns 10ha of vineyards and buys in grapes from

another 14 premier and grand cru hectares (five of which it farms). In its 30 different 'lieux-dits' the vines, grafted by massal selection by the brothers' grandfather Albert from 1930 onwards, have an average age of over 40 years and are naturally low yielding. Since the summer of 2020, all the estate has High Environmental Value certification level 3.

The range begins with Veuve-Fourny's distinctive, purple-labelled Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru, which few would readily identify as being a zero-dosage champagne. It has seven years on its lees and further textural richness is imparted in part by the 25% of the blend vinified in oak casks, plus 20% of reserve wine from the three

previous harvests and the concentration that comes from lower-yielding Chardonnay vieilles vignes that are four decades-plus in the soil.

Charles Fourny notes: "Forty years ago, the wines needed quite a high dosage, they remained acidic even after the second fermentation and two years in the cellar. For the past 10 years, dosage has hardly been necessary at all. But we prefer the quality of the champagne we are getting now, even if the change in the weather is not so good generally, for us in Champagne it's perfect.

"In the past two years we reached phenolic ripeness at a lower level of potential alcohol."





# CHAMPAGNE ALFRED GRATIEN

MAISON ARTISANALE DEPUIS 1864

Alfred Gratién is a divine masterpiece. A work of art that embodies our craftsmanship, know-how and heritage. Our wine is aged in century-old oak barrel cellars, which slowly matures and over time releases a divine evaporation: "la part des anges".



ALFRED GRATIEN, SHARED WITH ANGELS.

ALCOHOL ABUSE IS DANGEROUS FOR YOUR HEALTH. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.



## 27 ALFRED GRATIEN

[ALFREDGRATIEN.COM](http://ALFREDGRATIEN.COM)

Great to celebrate Alfred Gratien's 160th anniversary at the Bristol hotel in Paris last June, en route to detailed tastings in Epernay with winemaker Nicolas Jaeger. It was good to see all the investment by major sparkling wine group Henkell Freixenet, since it purchased the house in 2000.

It has backed Jaeger, the fourth generation of his family to work as Gratien's cellar master,

**"A TEMPERATURE-CONTROLLED BARREL STORAGE FACILITY HOLDS 1,000 BARRELS"**

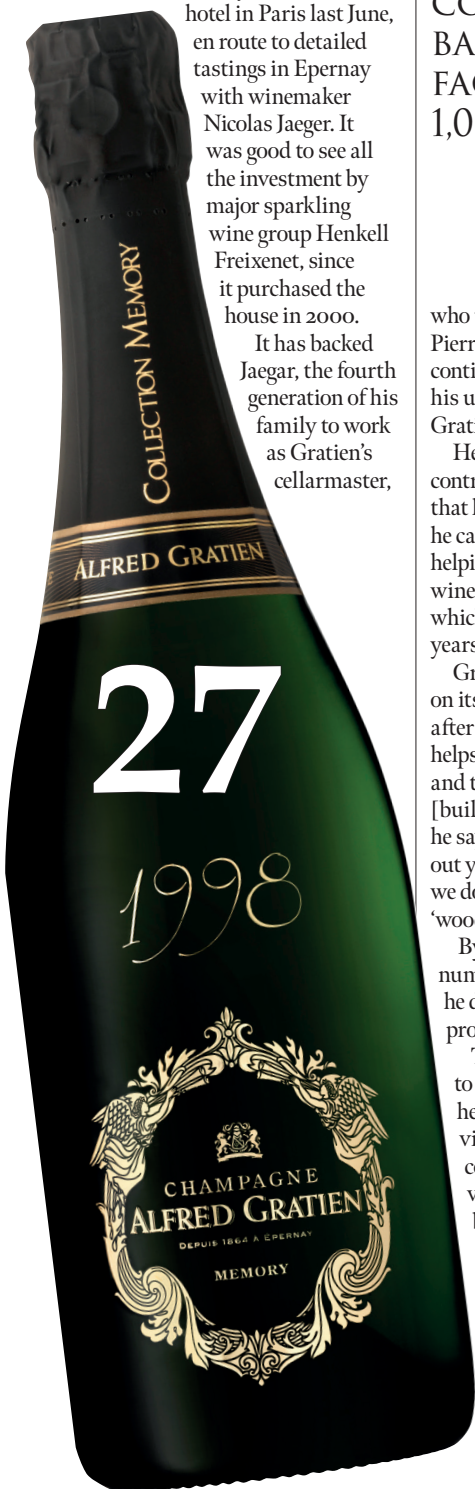
who took over from his father Jean-Pierre in 2007, in his ambition to continue with and further refine his use of oak in making all the Gratien range.

He now has a temperature-controlled barrel storage facility that holds 1,000 barrels, where he can also control the humidity, helping restrict the amount of wine lost to the angels' share, which took him three to four years to perfect.

Gratien leaves the pressed wine on its lees in barrel for six months after the harvest. "The sediment helps keep the wine reductive and the oak supports the wine [building texture and spice notes]," he says. "If you separate the lees out you get more oak flavours that we don't want, we are not after 'woody' champagne."

By 2023 Gratien had built up the number of barrels to 350,000 and he doesn't want more, but he has proposed further large foudres.

The new kit has enabled Jaeger to experiment further, which he's relishing. He's made multi-vintage blend Cuvée 565, which comprises five consecutive vintages from 2007 to 2011, blended in 2012 and then aged for a further six years before disgorgement. And this same five-harvest blend has evolved into Cuvée 595 in magnum that gets nine years ageing on its lees before being disgorged, with no dosage, as a Brut Natural.



## 28 PIPER-HEIDSIECK

[PIPER-HEIDSIECK.COM](http://PIPER-HEIDSIECK.COM)

Émilien Boutillat is one of the winemakers who features in two separate Most Admired entries, also looking after Rare. With Piper at least, even though he hasn't been at the house that long, he's already talking about wines he actually made himself with the 2018 Piper vintage I re-tasted in January, looking even better than at launch with another year of ageing.

In addition, Boutillat has put a lot of his time into successfully coming up with one-off projects to help fill the top-of-the-range gap that the departure of Rare from the Piper offering has caused. His Hors Série relaunch of two bottlings of the glorious 1982 vintage of Piper's Brut Sauvage was a masterstroke. And a clever way to shine further light on Piper's vintage offering, which has tended to go relatively uncelebrated in the past, despite its good quality.

The next Hors Série initiative, making two Blanc de Noirs Coteaux Champenois from the 2022 harvest, might be seen by some as a little left field. These are both white Pinot Noirs, respectively from grands crus vineyards in Ambonnay and Ay, and give us some insight into the material a winemaker is working with when they assemble a cuvée. As Boutillat himself said at the launch tasting: "Making amazing white wine with two-thirds black grapes is central to the production of champagne. And it was," he thought, "too obvious to make a red, Pinot Noir Coteaux."

Apart from their high quality, what's striking about these two wines is how different they are from each other. The Ay wine is distinctly more muscular, powerful and straight, while Ambonnay is creamier, more delicate, with attractive ripe yellow fruit. They were picked at potential alcohol levels respectively of 12.3% and 12.5% – levels which the recent sunny growing seasons in Champagne can now easily produce.

Of course, this all fits together rather neatly as a Blanc de Noirs style is the latest wine Boutillat has added to the successful premium BSA Essentiel range, and that's rather good too.





MAISON FONDÉE EN 1785

**PIPER-HEIDSIECK**

CHAMPAGNE



The Piper-Heidsieck *Essentiel* collection.  
Three Champagnes that meet the demands of gastronomy  
through their complexity and profile.

Extended ageing on lees  
Full transparency on the label  
Low dosage

Certified



Corporation





*« Nature causes,  
Man does. »*

— Emmanuel Kant

CHAMPAGNE  
**JACQUESSON**  
— DEPUIS 1798 —

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## 29= GH MUMM

[MUMM.COM](http://MUMM.COM)

The journey to completely restore GH Mumm's reputation in the UK market, continues. The arrival of winemaker Yann Munier (pictured), who I met up with towards the end of the 2024 harvest, looks to be a positive step. He is personable and has had dealings with large négociants (including Mumm) from the other side, when supplying them with grapes from the family business based in Vitry-le-Francois south east of Chalon.

The meticulous Laurent Fresnet, sadly no longer with us, will no doubt have left everything in good order in much the same way that Dominique Demarville did when Didier Mariotti took over. We are now seeing the BSA blends that Fresnet created come to the market as the first he assembled was the '19

base – generally superb – arriving in January 2020 just before the blending using that '19 harvest took place.

While the RSRV wines have been looking good for some years now – the only issue to really reap the benefit of this quality being getting them in front of more buyers and decision makers so they can appreciate this – the Cordon Rouge Brut, remodelled by Demarville in his time at the house, has stepped up in quality too, helped, I suspect, by the warmer harvests.

Within the RSRV range I was very impressed, at a pre-Christmas gathering at The Edition hotel in London, with the current blend of the RSRV4.5. For those who don't know this cuvée, and I fear there may still be many, the five



refers to the fact it's a blend of this number of grands crus vineyards, where GH Mumm owns sizeable chunks of land. To be precise, Pinot Noir from Verzenay, Bouzy and Ay, plus Cramant and Avize Chardonnay. The four stands for a minimum of four years of ageing,

but the current blend (as the back label reveals) is actually based on the excellent 2014 harvest. This goes a long way to explaining why it looks so good. And Best UK Sommelier 2023 Giuseppe d'Aniello, who buys the list at the hotel, was selling it by the glass.



## 29= POMMERY

[CHAMPAGNEPOMMERY.COM](http://CHAMPAGNEPOMMERY.COM)

Changes to the business at the end of 2024 see Nathalie Vranken takeover as chief executive of the Vranken-Pommery Monopole (VPM) group, while Paul-François Vranken remains chairman of the board of directors. VPM has also announced an expanded management team to ease this period of transition, with head winemaker at Pommery Clément Pierlot and Julien Lonneux each appointed as her deputy CEOs.

Lonneux has been with the company since 2014, running the European and African markets in addition to managing the important UK operation. Pierlot, who joined 10 years earlier, is director of the vineyards in Champagne, has been cellar master since 2017 and represents the group at the CIVC. He also oversees the vineyards and wines at Pommery's estate in Hampshire, England.

Pierlot still somehow finds the time to send detailed, informed comments about the Champagne harvest each year to help me compile the reports that feature in each Most Admired supplement. Interestingly, with the difficult 2024 harvest, the house pushed the ripening process a little further in its own vineyards, with a target alcoholic potential of 10.5% and 11% by vol for the prestige lines Cuvée Louis and Clos Pompadour, the large walled vineyard in Reims behind the winery that sits above their extensive cellars. "The quality of the year [2024] also enabled us to make high-quality red wines with good ripeness and perfect health," says Pierlot.

While he said at the year end it was "too early to say definitively that 2024 will be a vintage," as a large part of the blending for Grand Cru vintage and Cuvée Louise is done at harvest time, he is "very optimistic after the initial tastings". Last year Pierlot's major project was relaunching Apanage Brut 1874, a blend of three good vintages – 2012, 2015, and 2018, – with 45% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay and 15% Meunier combined with 16% from Pommery perpetual reserve and given a light 7gm/l dosage. A wine of richness and depth, it commemorates 150 years of Brut Champagne.





APANAGE 1874  
EXPERIENCE POMMERY #1

POMMERY

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## 31= LALLIER

[CHAMPAGNE-LALLIER.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-LALLIER.COM)

Dominique Demarville has now put his stamp on the Lallier operation, with a new winery addition at the modern site in Oiry (which is almost adjacent to the Barons Rothschild's new facility), giving him more tools to further refine his impeccable winemaking. And this year, we have the best evidence about his plans for the future style of the brand with the new Brut sans Année blend Réflexion R.021 based on the 2021 harvest, which represents his first 'harvest to bottle' creations at Lallier.

Excitingly, he also made his and Lallier's first rosé Réflexion from the challenging 2021 harvest, which you may remember was marked by severe spring frosts and

**"A LITTLE MORE TEXTURE AND SPICE IS BROUGHT TO THE BLENDS"**

high rainfall, with mildew issues following, but with some decent material bought in thanks to better weather during and just before the actual picking.

The first point of interest and change that Demarville has introduced to the white blend, mimicked in the pink assemblage, is the introduction of some Meunier, while previously it had just been Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. R.021 Brut is 49% Pinot Noir, 44% Chardonnay, and 7% Meunier, featuring 30% reserve wines from the previous 2020 harvest.

Drawing on his extensive work refining the rosé offering at Veuve Clicquot in a previous life, the R.021 Brut Rosé offers a refined blend of 53% Pinot Noir (with 7% of that from Bouzy vinified as red wine), 41% Chardonnay and 6% Meunier, the Bouzy rouge bringing "an added touch of vivacity and structure". A little more texture and spice is brought to the blends with 7-8% fermented and aged on fine lees in oak barrels, while to help preserve freshness up to one fifth doesn't go through malolactic fermentation.

The rosé refreshingly (at a time when near colourless Provençal-like rosés are all the rage in champagne), is an almost 'shocking pink' hue and for me Pinot Noir with a hint of Burgundy, which Demarville loves, is very much to the fore with fresh red fruits but a little element of structure and lots of appeal.



## 31= TELMONT

[CHAMPAGNE-TELMONT.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-TELMONT.COM)

I went back to see the Telmont operation in Damery in December, meeting up with dynamic chief executive Ludovic du Plessis (pictured). His first step, even on a chilly December morning, was to whizz me in a mini electric jeep, up to the vineyard immediately above the winery, looking northwards down towards the nearby Marne River.

There he gave me a brief synopsis of Telmont's all-round 'green' approach, delivered with some passion, saying the only approach that made sense in Champagne today was a sustainable combination of regenerative farming and organic viticulture. And noting it hosted "the very first Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA) forum in Europe in a barn on the Telmont estate in October".

The L'hôpital family was already farming a good chunk of the estate organically when Rémy Cointreau took over, that was always part of the attraction. Today Telmont has 25ha certified organic and the plan is for 100% in its own and suppliers' vineyards.

Du Plessis has also quickly instigated policies designed to reduce its carbon footprint with electric vehicles, using significantly lighter 800g bottles made from 87% recycled material, abandoning packaging, banning all gift boxes since June 2021. Telmont has also, says Du Plessis, taken steps to encourage biodiversity on both its estate and that of its winegrowing partners.

The family's winemaker, Bertrand L'hôpital, still plays a major role. We try the five-strong range together, including the just-launched organically certified Réserve de la Terre, a 2020-based three-way blend (Chardonnay 34%, Meunier 44%, Pinot 22%) that has 30% reserve wine with equal parts of '18 and '19 in the blend, three years when farming organically was relatively straightforward in Champagne, thanks to plenty of sunshine which shows in the glass.

The Réserve Brut, '19 based with near 30% reserve wine and the Blanc de Blancs vintage 2014 really impress. Smart, clear labelling with the precise blend, dosage, details of the disgorgement date and reserve wine element, completes the picture of openness which is also to be welcomed.







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CHAMPAGNE



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“WHAT ATTRACTED LVMH IS THE DIFFERENT TARGET AUDIENCE FOR THE BRAND”

33



## 33 ARMAND DE BRIGNAC

[ARMANDEBRIGNAC.COM](http://ARMANDEBRIGNAC.COM)

Moët Hennessy bought a 50% stake in Armand de Brignac in February 2021 and took over running its global distribution, making it equal partners with Shawn 'Jay-Z' Carter in the business. Given that distribution of any luxury champagne brand is key, the benefits of the deal are significant for future international sales and have no doubt helped get the brand its recognition among our survey voters too.

Currently the wine continues to be made by Alexandre Cattier, whose family business in Chigny-les-Roses, in the northern Montagne de Reims, was involved in its creation, particularly its distinctive packaging. We don't know what the deal is but assume there was some sort of long-term contract between Jay-Z and the Cattiers for making it. Though it is tempting to think LVMH might want to bring its production 'in-house' as it were, at some point in the future. Sales were put at "over 500,000 bottles in 2019" in a Moët Hennessy press release at the time of the sale, which would make it a similar size to Krug, in January 1999, at the time LVMH bought that brand from Rémy-Cointreau, though we know Krug has grown in volume since.

What attracted LVMH, whose four main champagne brands all have competitive lines to the Ace of Spades range, is the different target audience for the brand, recently described as a "slightly younger demographic than some other luxury champagne brands, 30 to 50-year-olds, the sort of people who are investing in art and other collectibles". People who "buy it to drink [not put in their cellar]. That's why it's made in a super fresh and easy-to-drink style".

It also sells at stratospheric prices and while some 80% of sales are accounted for by the Brut Gold NV blend that typically retails at around £315 at retailers like Selfridges, prices quickly move up to £1,055 for the Blanc de Noirs NV and, newly released last November, the limited-edition Blanc de Noirs 2015, only sold in magnum, is priced at over £2,500.

## 34 THIÉNOT

[CHAMPAGNE THIENTOT.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE THIENTOT.COM)

It's great to welcome back the Alain Thienot brand of champagnes, not that well known outside aficionados, to our coverage. This family operation, originally set up by Alain Thiénot in 1985, is now run by his son, Stanislas, and daughter Garance. A former courtier working in Champagne from 1968, Thiénot used his in-depth knowledge of the vineyards to build up holdings of some 30ha in the best premiers and grands crus which supply around four fifths of the grapes needed to produce 350,000 bottles.

Thiénot Brut is three varietal, non-vintage champagne blend of admirable freshness, with depth and texture, thanks to judicious ageing (2019 base), the complexity accentuated further when it comes in magnum.

The current Brut Rosé, which, thanks to the new informative back labels we know is based on the excellent 2020 harvest with 40% vins reserve and an Extra Brut dosage of 4gm/l, is a real, creamy textured delight.

The straight 2015 vintage, a blend of 60% Pinot, 30% Chardonnay and 10% Meunier, currently 2015, is a nicely structured example of that year, with plenty of room for more ageing to add further complexity.

The 'family named' cuvées should be some of Champagne's most sought after, but are still relatively little-known wines that delight those who discover them. Stanislas 2008 is a top-class Blanc de Blancs from a celebrated vintage in Champagne sourced from mainly grand crus vineyards in

Cramant, Avize and Chouilly.

The 'under-the-radar' single vineyard La Vigne Aux Gamins 2009, made from a single 0.5ha plot of grand cru Chardonnay in Avize with fewer than 3,500 bottles produced in any given vintage, has that star quality of great wine.

Partly to celebrate their 40th anniversary this year, the Thiénot family is launching a wine tourism project in the centre of Reims not far from the cathedral, which will include a champagne bar on the terrace. Should be a great opportunity for more people to get to know the excellent wines of this house when it opens in the summer.

34







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## 35 DUVAL-LEROY

[DUVAL-LEROY.COM](http://DUVAL-LEROY.COM)

Duval-Leroy has completely changed its business model, radically reducing production from around 5 million to just 1.5 million bottles, in little over a decade. It has entirely withdrawn from the BoB sector supplying UK grocers, to concentrate on premium and prestige styles, targeting the top-end on-trade and upmarket cavistes.

This new strategy makes sense given the cutthroat nature of the basic level business where price is all. Duval-Leroy's greatest asset has always been its large vineyard estate of some 100ha, predominantly planted with Chardonnay and much of it in the top crus of the Côte des Blancs.

Marketing itself as 'the house of Chardonnay,' Charles Duval-Leroy says it has simplified the range down to a smaller core to make it more understandable, reflecting that specialisation. Of the extra 50ha of grapes it needs to buy, it manages half of it and source the rest from growers with which it works closely.

Fleur de Champagne 1er Cru Brut is a 70/30 Chardonnay to Pinot Noir blend with a harvest base of 2016 that's from Vertus, Le Mesnil and Chouilly with the Pinot sourced in Bouzy, Ambonnay, Verzy and Verzenay. Half of the blend is reserve wine, of which 2% is aged in oak for nine months, which helps give it a noticeable richness and palate depth.

The Blanc de Blancs Prestige from the top 2008 vintage combines fruit from six grands crus villages – Le Mesnil, Oger, Avize, Cramant, Chouilly and Oiry, with two of the best Chardonnay parcels in home base Vertus, 4% being aged in oak for nine months.

Femme de Champagne is an 80/20 Chardonnay/Pinot blend with 20% oak that's all grand cru and, while it's not declared as such, is in fact all 2007 vintage. A very decent year for Chardonnay in particular, which shows in this impressive, mature, but still fresh, offering. The 2008 vintaged Femme, where 76% Chardonnay from Avize, Cramant, Oger and Le Mesnil is set against 24% Pinot from Ambonnay, is a prestige line any house would be proud of making.

## 36 BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD

[CHAMPAGNE-BDR.COM](http://CHAMPAGNE-BDR.COM)

When I visited Veuve Fourny in September 2023, I asked Charles Fourny what was going on next door, where a massive construction programme was evident to one side of a small, walled vineyard. He told me it was a Rothschild family project, a very ambitious plan to open a new winery and reception centre in the renovated 1870 building, complete with vaulted cellars, adjacent to the clos vineyard the house purchased in 2013.

Last December I returned, meeting up with Baron de Rothschild managing director Frédéric Mairesse to visit this unfinished project, due to open this summer, and the semi-buried, eco-friendly production plant in Oiry at the other end of the Côte des Blancs. This is for bottle ageing sur lattes, riddling, disgorgement and dispatch, only operational from the 2014 harvest. Both were designed by architect Giovanni Pace who was behind the new Royal Champagne hotel, ran the refurbishment of Taittinger's Saint Nicaise home in Reims and also Pol Roger's massive reconstruction of its central Epernay site.

When the Rothschilds announced plans to build a Grand Vin de Champagne from scratch, a few questioned whether they would have the stamina to bring this idea to fruition and create something that will sit in the champagne hierarchy, in a similarly elevated position as the family's wines achieve in Bordeaux.

Sourcing grapes in Champagne is always the first difficult hurdle for any newcomer to cross, but Barons de Rothschild already own 8ha of vineyards (seven in the Côte des Blancs) and contracts with 20 growers for another 77ha.

Winemaker Guillaume Lété, who studied viticulture and oenology in Avize before training as an agricultural

engineer, joining as an intern in 2011, working with Mairesse from the outset and becoming cellar master in 2016, has quickly built the vin de réserve. Collection Blanc de Blancs 2013 and Rare Rosé from the same vintage already impress.

The Rothschild operation in Champagne really comes of age in this, its 20th year in the appellation, with serious wines already on the market and now the facilities to make more top-end cuvées in place.





DE SAINT-GALL

CHAMPAGNE



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## 37 DE SAINT GALL

[DE-SAINT-GALL.COM](http://DE-SAINT-GALL.COM)

Union Champagne is one of two 'Rolls Royce' coops in Champagne's Côte des Blancs, located in central Avize, and walking round the winery you can see latest and best winemaking kit. It invested €12m in 2012 just for keeping reserve wines, explains head winemaker Cédric Jacopin (pictured), holding 15 different vintages separately going back to 2003 Le Mesnil, stored by grape variety and cru.

Union Champagne, which produces the De Saint Gall (DSG) range, is a union of 15 coops with more than 2,330 members across the appellation, who between them own 1,420ha of vineyard (enough to make 14 million bottles). Of this volume, 10% is used to produce DSG's 1.2 million bottles, 20-30% goes back to members to sell under their own labels and the remaining 60% is sold as vins clairs to the major houses.

The fine reputation of the DSG brand is mainly based on Chardonnay, predominantly sourced in the Côte des Blancs grands and premier crus vineyards. At the core of the range are four Blanc de Blancs styles, starting with the Premier Cru Brut sans Année, which Jacopin says accounts for about 80% of production.

We tasted the new Le Blanc Bio – it now has 25ha of certified vineyard, the majority in Vertus – and this is a 50/50, '21 and '20 harvest blend as DSG has only just started building bio reserve wines. With attractive juicy fruit, it's refreshingly crisp with an extra brut dosage. "We want to keep it in the DSG 'white flower' style, it's quite a challenge to make with no reserve wine." DSG Grand Cru 2016 Vintage is a generous and rich wine that draws on Ambonnay, Aÿ and Bouzy Pinot Noir to set against Côte des Blancs Chardonnay with around 25% non-malo material in the blend to keep the freshness.

Orpale 2012 Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru is the pinnacle of production, largely made from the substantial holdings in Oger and Le Mesnil. This is fine, age-worthy wine of real class.

## 38 LECLERC BRIANT

[LECLERCBRIANT.FR](http://LECLERCBRIANT.FR)

Pascal Leclerc Briant was one of the pioneers of the organic and biodynamic movement in Champagne. At that time nearly everyone else in the appellation – there were exceptions, such as Fleury in Courteron and a couple of other tiny producers – thought it an entirely cranky idea to farm vineyards this far north in France, where it's cold and wet, without using pesticides and herbicides. How times change.

Briant was a great person to have lunch with, to hear an alternative and entirely coherent view of what was going on in Champagne, after his death in 2010, his four daughters gradually sold off what was the largest bio-dynamically farmed estate in all Champagne at 30ha.

The Rouzaud family, in the early days of turning Roederer's

own estate into one organically and biodynamically farmed, bought some of the vineyards (initially 2ha in Cumières), and later another 13ha, plus the brand name, stocks, buildings in Epernay and grape purchase contracts. Lanson and Bruno Paillard also bought vineyard from the sisters.

The Rouzauds only really wanted the vineyard, and soon sold the brand, stock, buildings in Epernay and grape supply contracts to American financier Mark Nunnely and his partner Denise Dupré, the same couple who were behind the revamping of Royal Champagne.

They initially hired vineyard consultant Hervé Jestin, formerly winemaker at Duval Leroy and already known as something of an organic/biodynamic specialist.

They soon appointed Frederic Zeimett, ex Moët Hennessy, to run the house and he and Justin reshaped the whole operation. They now produce three ranges of wines, most of which are certified organic, including their 'entry level wine' Reserve Extra Brut (2.5gm/l), a three-way blend of Pinot (42%) Chardonnay (33%) and Meunier (25%) from the 2021 harvest base.

Three single vineyard wines, like the Blanc de Blancs Les Monts Ferres 2018, are vinified and aged in oak for nine months and retail for around £150.

Leclerc Briant Abyss Brut Zero 2018, is submerged for 12 months under the sea after being disgorged in January 2022 and will set you back around £195 a bottle.







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1760

Hervé Dantan, Cellar Master,  
reveals the 2005 Vintage  
after nearly two decades  
of ageing in cellars.



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## CHAMPAGNE

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## 39 LE MESNIL

[CHAMPAGNELEMESNIL.COM](http://CHAMPAGNELEMESNIL.COM)

This is the other great coop located in the Côte des Blancs. If you want to find top-quality Blanc de Blancs champagne, the grand cru village of Le Mesnil-sur-Oger has some of the best-known growers' champagnes, names like Pierre Peters come to mind, and two celebrated marques owned

respectively by Laurent-Perrier and LVMH (Salon and Krug Le Mesnil). But the producer with the best location, a smart state-of-the-art winery slap bang in the middle of the village, that also boasts ownership of over one-third of the cru's 435ha of vineyards, is the Le Mesnil cooperative with its 564 members.

Wines from this

"THE WINES ARE SOME OF THE MOST POTENTIALLY LONG-LIVED OF THE APPELLATION"

famous east-facing chalky terroir, nearly wholly planted with Chardonnay (it has fewer than 2ha of Pinot Noir), are some of the most sought after and potentially long-lived of the whole appellation. A large proportion of the grapes are therefore sold off to the top négociants for their best (and most expensive) cuvées. However, the remaining 10% are made into joyous expressions of the terroir by my namesake, Gilles Marguet.

These are nearly all Blanc de Blancs styles of champagne. Everything in the range is good (some is sublime) and even the Brut non-vintage, with the currently 2018 harvest base accounting for 90% of the blend, plus reserve wine from 2016 (8%) and 2014 (2%) will happily mature for several years in a good cellar and become more complex, though it already gets over five years before its first release.

Cuvée Heritage is a seven-vintage blend (heptallésime) from 2015 back to 2007, just missing out '13 and '11, only 3,246 bottles of which were vinified.

The vintage offering ranges from 2007 Prestige in magnum to Sublime 2017, while the regular Millesimé with that familiar green label, you are most likely to come across is now 2014.

Waitrose made the shockingly bad decision to destock this line, consistently the best value and arguably best champagne in its range, a couple of year ago.

Sadly I only have one bottle each of '12 and '13 left.



## 40 JOSEPH PERRIER

[JOSEPHPERRIER.COM](http://JOSEPHPERRIER.COM)

I always used to enjoy the company of Joseph Perrier's charismatic former boss Jean-Claude Fourmon, so great to return to Chalon-en-Champagne in December to meet up for an in-situ tasting with his charming son Benjamin, who now runs the business.

He's gradually introduced quite a few changes since his tenure began in 2019. The site in Chalon, which sits at the eastern corner of the main core Champagne vineyard on the way towards Vitry, has altered beyond recognition and now includes a smart visitor tour. The labelling and packaging have also had an upgrade, with the whole collection now in the same distinctive bottle shape in time to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the house's founding later this year.

The eight-strong range of wines hasn't changed that much and the flagship Cuvée Royale Brut remains a three-way blend broadly reflecting the appellation's plantings of 35% Pinot Noir and Chardonnay plus 30% Meunier. The current 2021 base is fresh, clean and fruity with some appealing ripe yellow fruit and 20% reserve wine adding a little depth. It's deliberately made in a very approachable, have-a-second-glass style.

A Brut Nature blend has an '18 base to help round it out, and is lead by a large 62% of Chardonnay, plus 24% Meunier and only 14% Pinot Noir. It's fairly austere and aimed at the Parisian market where restaurateurs like this sort of freshness, perhaps to accompany a plate of oysters.

Cuvée Royal vintage is now the 2015, and a 55/45 Chardonnay blend with an extra brut dosage of just 3gm/l. But it seems this very warm, dry harvest can handle that, and it's generous, rather than austere on the palate. New in the range is a 100% Meunier, zero dosage, which joins the single vineyard Cumières Pinot Noir La Côte à Bras 2014.

Prestige line Josephine, a 60/40 Chardonnay Pinot blend, is also on the 2014 harvest, and this expressive blend is gradually moving more towards Chardonnay to balance the riper, richer Pinot of recent warm harvests.





1522

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GILES FALLOWFIELD  
DELIVERS HIS ANNUAL IN-  
DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE  
CHAMPAGNE HARVEST

# HARVEST REPORT

ISTOCK.COM/ ROBERT PAVSIC

The Champagne growing season in 2024 once again underlines the very strong impact that climate change is having on the region. In the space of just the past decade we have had: the earliest start ever to picking (13 August in 2020) and the hottest viticultural year (2015 at that point, but the highest-ever temperature was reached in July 2019); the most sunshine hours between April and June and the most days over 30°C (in 2018); several candidates for the driest year recorded (2015 and 2018 when it was drier still, after a wet winter, though in fact 1976 is still the driest) and now in 2024 the wettest viticultural year on record.

You might expect the near incessant rain of 2024 to spell disaster across the appellation. However, while it did for some

who were left with barely any healthy grapes to harvest, good weather arriving at the eleventh hour in early August resulted in some decent quality material being picked, although the final yield achieved was, for many, below the maximum level set of 10,000kg/ha. And the average yield across the whole appellation is now estimated by the CIVC at about 8,120kg/ha.

In his detailed record of 2024, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, head winemaker at Louis Roederer, sums up the contradictions at the outset of his report by saying: "An Olympic record for rainfall... but a perfect, beautifully balanced final maturity." No one in Champagne will challenge the first remark, but feelings about the end result are more nuanced, although despite the very difficult season, producers are generally positive about what they have salvaged.

In fact, at the start of the harvest,

Lécaillon himself was sounding slightly downbeat given the extreme weather conditions of the growing season, which he described as "unmanageable" from a vigneron's perspective in the Côte des Bar. "In the south of the region, we are talking about yields of 3,000-4,000 kg/ha or even plots at zero."

But the north seems to be in a

**"GOOD WEATHER  
ARRIVING AT THE  
ELEVENTH HOUR  
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MATERIAL BEING  
PICKED"**

better position, particularly on the eastern side of the Côte des Blancs and the northern side of the Montagne de Reims where the vines are in satisfactory health and have higher yields "of between 8,000 and 9,000kg/ha, or even more than 10,000 in certain plots".

As Dominique Demarville, Lallier directeur général and chef de caves, also notes, 2024 was unique in that "we had rain every week from January to the beginning of August. But a few weeks of good weather later in August and early September saved the quality".

The struggle for vigneronns from the outset in 2024 was to preserve healthy vines, and this was the central problem right across the appellation. "It was challenging for winegrowers," says Piper Heidsieck winemaker Émilien Boutillat. "Depending ►



# CHAMPAGNE TELMONT

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CHAMPAGNE  
**TELMONT**  
MAISON FONDÉE EN 1912

N° 1164800

DÉGORGÉ EN 2024	DOSAGE 2,5 g/l	VINS VENDANGES 2020: 70% VINS DE RÉSERVE: 2019: 15% 2018: 15%
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CEPAGES 34% CHARDONNAY 44% MEUNIER 22% PINOT NOIR	ELABORATION 100% CERTIFIÉ AGRICULTURE BIOLOGIQUE FERMENTATION MALOLACTIQUE
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on the region, they had to face spring frosts, hail and rain during flowering, which caused issues like 'coulture' and 'millerandage' [poor grape set]. The rain also encouraged the spread of diseases such as downy mildew in most of the Champagne vineyards."

"We had it all in 2024, frost, hail, powdery mildew, and even sunburn [échaudage]," says Pommery winemaker Clément Pierlot. "The 2023-2024 season turned out to be truly Dantesque for Champagne, marked by incessant rain throughout the year (from October 2023 to October 2024).

"The situation varied greatly from one wine-growing region to another, depending on the cultivation techniques used. Farms practising sustainable viticulture or organic viticulture found it much more difficult to maintain harvest potential and contain weed pressure," Pierlot says.

The rain and wet soil "made it difficult to spray against mildew as it was difficult to get into some parcels", says Demarville. "It was more challenging still for 'bio growers', as they must treat whenever there is 20mm or more of rainfall and some weeks they had to spray with copper three or four times. This kind of weather is much harder for the bio growers than those adopting sustainable practices."

For Cédric Georget, vineyard manager at Deutz, which is converting all its own vineyards to organic farming, there were "a number of difficulties linked to weather conditions and disease". He continues: "Frost had a very limited impact, with a few buds

**"THE SITUATION VARIED GREATLY FROM ONE WINE-GROWING REGION TO ANOTHER, DEPENDING ON THE CULTIVATION TECHNIQUES USED"**



affected, but this represented less than 1% loss. However, flowering was disrupted by coulture and millerandage and this clearly affected the weight of the bunches, and on some plots things didn't develop as usual. I'd say we lost around 10% in yield as a result.

"But the main problem was downy mildew. We had two major attacks: one before flowering, which destroyed bunches, and another in July, following the [heavy] rains, which damaged the bunches on the vine. I think we could be talking about 50% losses as a result."

Lécaillon says: "Despite another extremely wet July, with rainfall exceeding 150% of normal, we observed some signs of scalding with the July 20-21 heatwave, which 'nibbled away' a few more percentage points from the size of the crop. Bunch closure occurred at the end of July, but the mildew symptoms worsened significantly, manifesting as brown rot throughout July due to the numerous stormy spells."

Alice Paillard also notes: "Rain has been a 'loyal' companion to most of the 2023-2024 campaign, even during flowering, which led to an uneven and slow development, creating several generations of fruits within the same vine. Logically enough, mildew invited itself everywhere in the appellation, its intensity depending on the crus and directly connected to the quantity of rainfall the vines received. This lasted until mid-July and ended up destroying a significant part of the potential harvest. Luckily, the end of August and early September offered good conditions: cool nights, gentle and sunny days without any excessive heat, and no rain."

Taittinger vineyard manager Christelle Rinville says: "While in recent years we have become accustomed to rapid flowering (completed in just a few days), this year's less-than-optimal weather conditions resulted in heavy 'shattering' (flower fall) and lengthy flowering over a



period of almost a month. As a result, berries at different stages of development were found side by side in the same bunch until ripening was complete.

"Other weather issues (hail, scalding), physiological (marked chlorosis at flowering due to lack of light, 20-30% below normal) or parasitic (exceptional mildew threat reminiscent of 2021) continued to affect the quantity of the harvest and growing dynamics throughout the season. After being several days ahead of schedule at bud burst then 10 days late at ripening, the vines have finished six days behind the 10-year average.

"In the Côte des Bar, where Taittinger has some substantial vineyard holdings, yields were badly affected by the weather conditions throughout the season (frost, damage due to stripping, shattering, hail) and by mildew which left a bitter taste... but everything possible was done to bring in some lovely marcs at over 10.5% vol for the Pinots and Meuniers and over 9% for the Chardonnays," says Rinville.

Vine growers here in Champagne's most southerly vineyards were not so lucky as regards spring frost and to make matters worse, the rainfall was considerably heavier there than in the vineyards of the northern part of the appellation around the Epernay core. At Drappier, based in the Côte des Bar village of Urville, which I visited in late September just after its 'short' harvest was completed, Hugo Drappier says that the three nights of frost in April (21-23) wiped out ▶



about 60-70% of its entire crop.

Excessive rainfall exacerbated its problems. "While Reims might expect around 650mm a year and here [in Urville] we generally have rather more at around 750mm, this year we've had nearly double that at 1,450mm and further south in Les Riceys they've had even more, about 1,600mm. It's my father's [Michel] 50th harvest and probably his smallest. The vines were extra-sensitive to mildew, after being weakened by the frost. But the weather has been good since the start of August, and we've had no issues with botrytis."

Further south still, the small harvest at Domaine Alexandre Bonnet in Les Riceys and surrounding villages started on 10 September and finished on 18, says Irvin Charpentier, head winemaker. "Generally, a harvest at Alexandre Bonnet would last 12-14 days while this one was only eight days.

"The yield varies widely between as little as 500kg and 5,000kg depending on the contrée (vineyard). We've suffered from hail and frost during the growing season, but we had healthy

grapes. Due to rainy days, we unfortunately had a lot of pressure from botrytis and mildew. Average potential alcohol is 9.6% vol with 75 g/l acidity with overall a good sugar/acidity balance."

Lécaillon recalls that "more than 1,070mm of rainfall descended on the region between October 2023 and September 2024, far exceeding the 10-year average of 700mm". He continues: "The months of April, July and September were particularly wet although, fortunately, in the latter month it did not rain until the very end of the harvest. To find comparable spring

**"THESE UNSTABLE WEATHER CONDITIONS KEPT OUR WINEGROWERS CONSTANTLY ON THEIR TOES THROUGHOUT THE SEASON"**

rainfall, we have to look back to 2016 (220mm), 2013 (233mm) and 2009 (229mm), although none of these years matched the record set in 2024 (270mm).

"The vines got off to a flying start, with bud break four days ahead of average (in early April). However, wild swings in temperature quickly slowed their progress, resulting in a six-day delay by the time they reached the full flowering stage (mid-June). The rainy and fairly sunless summer further delayed growth, resulting in a harvest that started eight to 10 days later than usual.

"These unstable weather conditions kept our winegrowers constantly on their toes throughout the season, carrying out gruelling work all the way up to the harvest. At times, it felt as if our efforts would be in vain as we raced against the clock faced with the powerful forces of Nature; 2024 was one of the most challenging vintages in the history of the Champagne region. However, as is so often the case in Champagne, August and September came along to save the vintage and reward all our hard work."

Lécaillon says: "Le mois d'août fait le goût (August makes the taste) is an old saying in the Champagne region and this year it proved true once again. The weather at last turned favourable, allowing the vineyards to recover, although it also revealed the full extent of the mildew infections brought on by the very wet July.

"Véraison (change in berry colour) began on 10 August but also progressed slowly with mid-véraison not being reached until 27 August on the Meunier, 28 August on the Pinot noir and 1 September on the Chardonnay. We were now 10 days behind the 10-year average, and the harvest was only three weeks away. Gradually, the rain became less frequent, the soil dried out and the vines regained their root function and enough energy to complete their cycle. From 26 August, véraison had accelerated sharply and a very dynamic ripening process was finally underway.

"The cool temperatures, combined with significant day-to-night temperature variations

and the gradual drying of the soils, created an excellent ripening dynamic – comparable to those of the 2020, 2019, 2016 and 2012 vintages," Lécaillon notes.

## HARVEST COMPLETED IN SEPTEMBER

Guillaume Lété, winemaker at Barons de Rothschild, says: "There was great heterogeneity in the vineyards, which had an impact above all on yields. The heavy rainfall on the southern slopes of the Montagne de Reims, towards Ambonnay, enabled moderate yields to be obtained. In the Côte des Blancs, flowering was spread out over time, giving rise to sometimes very different levels of ripeness, even within the same commune.

"Our best response was to be ambitious about the harvest dates. We didn't hesitate to postpone the start of the harvest twice in order to achieve the best possible balance and our picking took place between 17 and 29 September."

Boutillat says: "Regarding alcohol levels, patience was crucial this year due to the unpredictable weather, which extended the ripening process. We achieved an alcohol level of 10-10.5% across all three grape varieties, with the harvest concluding with Chardonnay, a rarity in itself."

Hervé Dantan, chef de cave at Lanson, says: "On harvest's eve, the situation was still uncertain. Finally, the Champagne miracle happened: the sun came back unexpectedly, and the cool temperatures offered optimal conditions for the ripening of the grapes, which could suggest a vintage of outstanding quality. We began picking on September 9 and ended on September 30. Despite the complicated year, the harvest was in a perfect sanitary condition."

At Perrier-Jouët, head winemaker Séverine Frerson says the harvest started in good weather with "pretty Meuniers from Dizy followed by Pinot Noirs in Aÿ, moving on to Chardonnay in Cramant on 18 September". Frerson continues: "From a quality point of view, we have a nice aromatic balance on the

HERVE DANTAN





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must with a nice freshness, a great potential to preserve.”

At early tastings of the vins clairs, Frerson notes: “Already, the Chardonnay is showing a lovely tension and florality, and the results for the vintage are promising. Overall, the aromatic palette is floral, less ripe and more delicate than usual, with a pleasant vertical tension. Thanks to a balance of sugar and acid, as well as tension and verticality, the wines are showing real potential for ageing.

“I’ve dreamed of a vintage like this for a long time, one with tension and acidity. With 2024, we have a true Champagne vintage, a classic, like one from 2012 or 2016, and it’s thanks to the hard work of our teams, who handled a difficult harvest beautifully.”

## MEUNIER AND PINOT NOIR IMPRESS

Caroline Latrive, winemaker at Deutz, says: “The disappointment of the low yields they reached – at just 5,700 kg/ha in our own vineyards – is more than made up for by the quality of the wines we produced. That’s what put the smile back on our faces during the harvest. Even though the yields were modest, the grapes picked and the musts tasted were very promising, and this is confirmed today (in early January) when we taste the vins clairs.

“As far as the Meunier is concerned, it’s a very nice surprise. The wines are very aromatic and acidic, which is exactly what you’d expect from a quality Meunier. As for the Pinot Noir, it’s quite simply exceptional. The wines have great structure, complexity and elegance.

The Chardonnays are very promising, very lively, with lovely citrus fruit aromas. The Chardonnays have tension, freshness and salinity with great potential to develop, but it’s still a little early for them to reveal all. I think we’ll get a better idea of their full potential in the spring,” says Latrive.

Floret Nye, winemaker at Billecart-Salmon, speaking in early December says: “We began the tasting a week ago with good expectations with all varieties.



Pinot and Chardonnays are very concentrated, especially in Le Mesnil sur Oger and Mareuil sur Ay. Meuniers are very fruity and fresh, while the red wine made from Pinot Noir is dark coloured.

“The year gave us a good level of fruit maturity, for an average natural degree at 10.3%. Pinots

**“WE HAVE GREAT EXPECTATION TO BLEND VINTAGES THIS YEAR, BUT WE WILL ONLY TAKE THE FINAL DECISIONS IN THE SPRING”**

Noirs were the ripest grape variety reaching more than 10.5%. Acidity levels are quite good, about 6g/L H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> after malolactic fermentation, giving for the wine the classic acidity of wines from the 1990s.

“We have great expectation to blend vintages this year, but we will only take the final decisions in the spring once the wines have had the opportunity to enrich on lees and when they are properly rested. I’d compare 2024 with two past vintages, 2012 and 1990. I think it is a hybrid between these two.”

For Dantan: “Pinots Noirs from the Montagne de Reims and Meuniers from the Vallée de la Marne were magnificent. Despite a slower ripening than usual, Chardonnays were also very promising. It is not uncommon for the maturity of Chardonnay to catch up with that of black grapes although it begins later. This year,

however, Chardonnay was ‘lazier’, sometimes requiring picking to be delayed for the optimal level of maturity.

“The sugar/acidity balances are different from those of recent years and are more comparable to those of vintages like 2012 and 2013. The good concentration of sugar and the fairly sustained acidity suggest a very fine Champagne vintage, with wines characterised by freshness typical of the Lanson style.”

For Pommery winemaker Clément Pierlot, speaking at the end of December: “The end-of-malo tastings have been completed, as have our pre-blends. The wines are exceptionally fresh, crisp and refined. In fact, I think the words ‘finesse’ and ‘tension’ sum up the character of this vintage perfectly.

“The Pinots Noirs, even at this early stage, are already very promising, with a silky, elegant texture and vibrant notes of fresh fruit. Special mention should be made of the incredibly elegant Pinot Noirs from the northern part of the Montagne de Reims, particularly Verzenay.

“The Meuniers are perhaps the grape variety that stands out the most this year. Whether the Meuniers are characterised by citrus fruit and softness or the more structured Meuniers with notes of yellow fruit, this year’s wines are impressively precise and fresh.

“As for the Chardonnays, some say they’re slightly behind, but for us I find them remarkable with exceptional potential; refined, linear, with a striking minerality and a very racy saline character. There’s no doubt that we should be able to blend a great Clos Pampadour and a Cuvée Louise this year.

“While this vintage is not abundant in terms of quantity, it is exceptional in terms of quality. The wines have a unique personality that we are keen to preserve and enhance. We’re particularly excited to see how these base wines will fit into the blends and look forward to revealing their full potential in the months ahead.”

Boutillat at Piper Heidsieck says: “We began tasting the still ▶





# G.H. MUMM

CHAMPAGNE



wines in November 2024 and so far, the tastings have been very promising across all three grape varieties. The Chardonnays are highly mineral, fresh and acidic, with great citrus aromas. The Pinot Noirs show structure and refined elegance; they are still shy for now but promising. For me, the Meuniers stand out, offering crisp, tangy fruit and a seductive mouthfeel. These initial tastings suggest the potential for exceptional blends and possibly outstanding vintages.

"I find Meunier to be the standout grape variety of this harvest, a trend I have observed over the past five years. Although it requires sometimes more effort in viticulture compared to other varieties, Meunier responds exceptionally well to the recent climate changes, managing to retain its crisp fruitiness and tangy aromas."

Commenting in mid-January, Guillaume Lété, winemaker at Barons de Rothschild, said: "Both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have a good potential to date. Wines are revealing day after day a nice structure and finesse. Pinot Noirs are elegant, with a nice texture in mouth (mâche), and a well-balanced power. Chardonnay still needs more *élevage*, which is a very important part for us (nine months minimum), but it's already showing a beautiful tension, precision at first nose, and a texture in mouth which promises a nice structure in time. To date, everything seems to come together to have a potentially nice vintage *cuvée* from the 2024 crop. The concentration is promising."

"We had the tremendous luck not to suffer from rot, thanks to

the cool temperatures at the end of summer and during the harvest. The same excessive rainfall with higher temperatures, for example heat at the end of August, would have been a disaster," says Lété.

"The most unusual characteristic of this viticultural year is the excessive rainfall. A year like this shows that you need to adapt and be flexible. The more complicated the situation, the more adaptability you must demonstrate. We had to be able to intervene very quickly both in vineyard protection and in our choices to harvest at the right time. The more complicated it is, the more reactive you have to be.

#### COMPARABLE HARVESTS

Pierlot at Pommery says it's a bit early to compare 2024 with a previous vintage. "While the difficulties of the year were reminiscent of 2021, the dynamics of ripening and the characteristics of the musts are very similar to those of 2012 and 2016, vintages that were no less difficult but with

incredible potential for quality."

For Latrive: "From a viticultural point of view, this year is truly atypical due to the excess rainfall. However, the analytical parameters of the 2024 harvest are close to those of 2008, 2012 and 2016, all exceptional vintages, which promises well."

Boutillat says: "If I had to compare with the most recent vintages, I would pick 2012. The challenging weather in the vineyards ending up with perfect weather, small yield but great concentration and potential reminds me a lot of 2012.

"The balance of the grapes is quite unusual. Since 2018, we have grown accustomed to warmer years, but this year the balance reminds us of older vintages, with higher acidity and malic levels. It underscores the significant impact of climate change, which is why we must adapt every year.

"What makes 2024 unique are its low pH levels and high malic acid content—characteristics that have become rare in Champagne in

recent years but were more typical of the 1990s."

For Demarville: "Meuniers are excellent, Pinot Noirs very good as they were at their best in terms of maturity. Chardonnays are a little bit more challenging, especially those picked at the end of the harvest under the rain and at a low level of ripeness. But thanks to this good level of quality, I will declare a vintage at Lallier.

"This harvest reminds me of the harvests when I was a young winemaker. It shows good acidity and good length. On paper, 2024 is close to 2016 and 2012. But each vintage is one of a kind. We'll have to wait five to six years to know more."

In the last week of the 2024 harvest on 25 September I drove up from Drappier in the Côte des Bar to visit Mumm's vineyards at the windmill in Verzenay and taste some new 2024 vins clairs. In the light but persistent rain we only saw two small groups of pickers in the grand crus of Mailly and Verzenay, where nearly all the black grapes had been gathered by the previous Monday (23 September).

However, with around 10 days of sunshine and cool nights up until the previous weekend, the quality of what had been bought in and pressed is certainly not low. I tasted with GH Mumm winemaker Yann Munier material from three different plots that were picked on Monday in the crus of Avenay, Aÿ and Chouilly.

The first two were Pinot Noir of very similar degree and acidity with Avenay at 10.2% potential alcohol and 7.4 acidity, while Aÿ was at 10.6% and 7.3gm/l acidity. Cloudy, with deliciously sweet fruit, this looks like very good raw material, as Munier observes. The pronounced pink Aÿ example, also showing enough grapefruit-like acidity to finish noticeably fresh. The Chouilly Chardonnay must, picked at 10% potential alcohol and with acidity at 6.4gms/l, is more on the floral than citrus side.

As Munier notes, they are displaying acidity levels not really seen in Champagne for a decade or so and, as blending material to put with the recent past super-ripe harvests, add significantly to the options that winemakers in the region have at their disposal. 🌿



HARVEST AT BRUNO  
PAILLARD

"THIS YEAR  
THE BALANCE  
REMINDS US OF  
OLDER VINTAGES,  
WITH HIGHER  
ACIDITY AND  
MALIC LEVELS"



# LALLIER

CHAMPAGNE

NATURE IN MOTION



A creative porcelain wall piece  
inspired by the 2021 harvest by

*Olivia Walker*

DRINK LALLIER RESPONSIBLY





# THE LIST

NO.	COMPANY	MOVERS
1	LOUIS ROEDERER	NON-MOVER
2	KRUG	NON-MOVER
3	BOLLINGER	NON-MOVER
4	BILLECART-SALMON	NON-MOVER
5	CHARLES HEIDSIECK	UP2
6	POL ROGER	DOWN1
7	RUINART	UP1
8	DOM PERIGNON	DOWN2
9	TAITTINGER	NON-MOVER
10	SALON	RE-ENTRY
11	GOSSET	UP12
12	LAURENT-PERRIER	DOWN1
13	PHILIPPONNAT	UP2
14	RARE	UP4
15	JACQUESSON	DOWN3
16	VEUVE CLICQUOT	DOWN2
17	PERRIER-JOUET	DOWN7
18	DRAPPIER	DOWN5
19	HENRI GIRAUD	RE-ENTRY
20	BRUNO PAILLARD	DOWN4

NO.	COMPANY	MOVERS
21	DEUTZ	DOWN1
22	HENRIOT	DOWN2
23=	PALMER & CO	UP6
23=	MOET & CHANDON	DOWN6
23=	LANSON	UP1
26	VEUVE-FOURNY	UP2
27	ALFRED GRATIEN	NON-MOVER
28	PIPER-HEIDSIECK	DOWN3
29=	GH MUMM	DOWN7
29=	POMMERY	DOWN3
31=	LALLIER	DOWN1
31=	TELMONT	DOWN10
33	ARMAND DE BRIGNAC	RE-ENTRY
34	THIÉNOT	NEW ENTRY
35	DUVAL-LEROY	RE-ENTRY
36	BARON DE ROTHSCHILD	NEW ENTRY
37	DE SAINT GALL	NEW ENTRY
38	LECLERC BRIANT	NEW ENTRY
39	LE MESNIL	RE-ENTRY
40	JOSEPH PERRIER	RE-ENTRY



GOOD DAY SUNSHINE\*



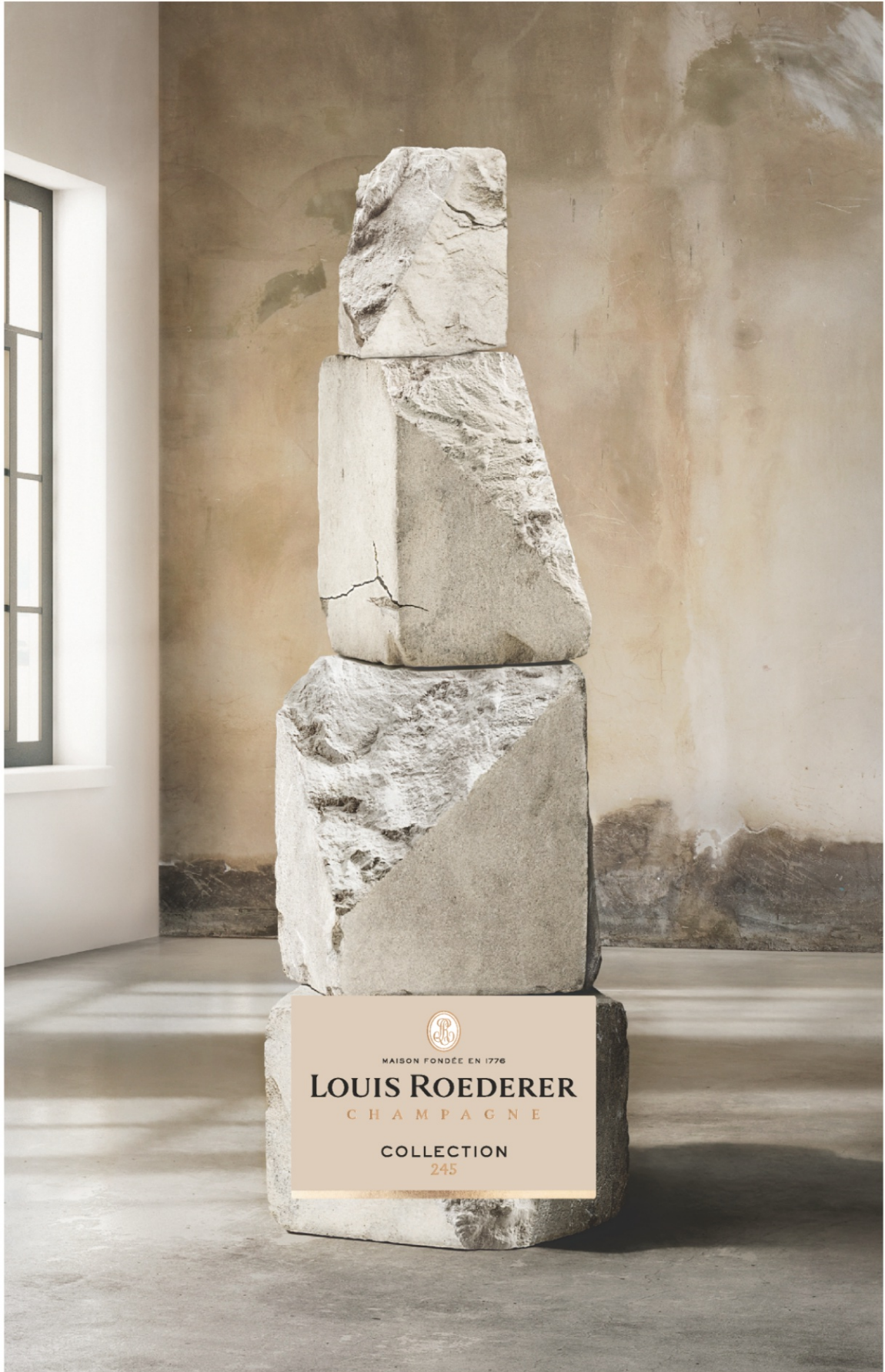
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