

Aging Gracefully with a Broad Horizon: Champagne 2026 Tasting Report

778 TASTING NOTES Monday, Aug 17, 2026



Left: James and the team kick off their Champagne tastings at de Venoge. | Right: One of the Champagnes to earn our coveted perfect rating was the dense, consistent and endless Salon Champagne Brut Blanc De Blancs 1996. (James Suckling photos)

The 1904 Pol Roger Extra Cuvée Réserve showed incredible freshness, but at the same time complexity and richness, with flavors reminiscent of apple tart, brown sugar, pie crust, nuts and amontillado Sherry. It was a perfect example of what aged Champagne can become after decades in a cellar – something no other wine can quite deliver.

Granted, the bottle was disgorged in December 2000, which may have helped the old wine seem younger. But it was still in near-perfect condition for a Champagne more than 120 years old.

“We have a lot of demand for old Champagne now,” said Hubert de Billy, a member of Pol Roger’s executive board. “Both young and old are interested in aged Champagne. It is more and more popular.”

Of course, this is a tiny segment of the overall market. Champagne shipments totaled 266.1 million bottles in 2025, down from 326 million in 2022. But the fascination with older bottles highlights the diversity and continued appeal of Champagne, which remains one of the world's best-selling premium wines.



James shows the 1904 Pol Roger Extra Cuvée Réserve he tasted. He called it a "perfect example" of what a Champagne can become. (James Suckling photo)



The cork on the 1904 Pol Roger. (James Suckling photo)

"More and more people want to buy old vintages of Champagne," said Gilles Morisson de la Bassetiere, the president and director-general of Champagne de Venoge, which holds small stocks of older Champagnes sought by collectors around the world. "A lot of people are asking for old vintages. I could have sold our cellar 10 times. They realize that Champagne ages really well."

He added: "The demand for old red wines is going lower and lower, and they are easy to find. But Champagne is different. There isn't enough."

Indeed, we tasted a number of recently released older bottles during our group tastings with more than 100 producers in mid-July in Epernay, and we were elated to go back in time through these unique wines. A complete tasting of every vintage of Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires, along with various old vintages of Dom Pérignon, Rare and Salon highlighted the superb quality and extraordinary aging potential of Champagne.

We also tasted many new vintages and nonvintage wines, bringing the total to almost 800 wines, not to mention another 200 or so tasted in our Hong Kong office.





James tastes at Champagne de Venoge with Gilles Morrison de la Bassetiere, the house's president and director-general. (James Suckling photo)



A bottle of the "exquisite" De Venoae Champagne Louis XV Brut Rosé 2018. (James Suckling photo)



harvests, with older reserve wines blended in. They are two very different vintages. 2022 was marked by a hot and dry growing season, while 2021 was wet and difficult. I prefer the 2021-based wines for their freshness and brightness despite the difficult conditions, but the bold and rich wines from 2022 are not as heavy as I expected.

Also, keep an eye out for 2018 vintage Champagne. I like the balance and freshness of the wines, even though some winemakers didn't seem to like it and preferred the richer and more structured 2019.

In general, we found the nonvintage Champagnes less banal in character and more complete than they were a decade ago, when many were marked by lower alcohol and higher acidity. Much of their character then could be covered by dosage – the mixture of wine and sugar added after disgorgement and before final corking. Dosage gave drinkability to the Champagnes as well as a recognizable house style.



Marie Kim-Suckling (front right) leads the tasting at Charles Heidsieck of every vintage of their Blanc des Millénaires. (James Suckling photo)



James shows the "energetic and vivid" Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 1996. (James Suckling photo)

Today, the base wines, or *vins clairs*, can be higher in alcohol and much more like table wines, sometimes approaching 12 percent alcohol. The need for dosage is much less, which is one reason more Extra Brut, Brut Nature and zero-dosage bottlings are available. Champagne in general is also much more distinctive.

"We have to be a wine of Champagne," said Elise Bougy, a grower and Champagne producer based in Les Mesneux, a Premier Cru village in the Montagne de Reims just southwest of Reims. About two-thirds of her roughly three hectares are there. She also has Chardonnay vineyards in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, a Grand Cru village in the Cote des Blancs. She makes some of my favorite Champagnes at the moment.

"Wine is what we are," she added. "We are not just Champagne anymore."



James checks Champagne Élise Bougy's vineyard in Les Mesneux with the owner. (James Suckling photo)



A closeup view of what makes Champagne so special: the chalky soil. (Aldo Fiordelli photo)



James catches up with Vincent Chaperon, the winemaker at Dom Perignon. (James Suckling photo)



A row of older vintages of Dom Perignon. (James Suckling photo)

As proof of what she said, I tasted during our trip a range of 2025 base wines for Dom Perignon with chef de cave Vincent Chaperon, and I was surprised by how attractive the young wines already were. They showed clear differences in character directly related to their vineyard sites, including soil type, exposure to the sun, altitude and microclimate.

I remember similar tastings 20 years ago, and they were nothing like that. The base wines mostly tasted the same, with searing acidity and thin fruit.

For me, Champagne has become more and more about the wine itself, which is why I always use the word “wine” when describing it. Champagne is no longer defined simply by secondary fermentation in the bottle, aging on the lees and dosage.

The fact that the still wines of Champagne, or *Coteaux Champenois*, have become so much better also underlines this change. We have written extensively about them during the last two years, [including a report from me in January](#). The warmer and sunnier vintages of recent years have often benefited Champagne’s main growing regions: Montagne de Reims, Vallee de la Marne, Cote des Blancs and Cote des Bar.

We were looking for this *vinous* character in our highest-rated Champagnes – wines with depth of flavor and complex, developing palates. Our top-rated bottles, all 100 points, included the [Charles Heidsieck Champagne Blanc des Millénaires Brut 2017](#), [Billecart-Salmon Champagne L’Excellence 2002](#), [Piper-Heidsieck Champagne Rare 2012](#), [Dom Pérignon Champagne P2 2008](#), [Louis Roederer Champagne Cristal Late Release Magnum 2008](#) and [Salon Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs 1996](#).

Our 99-point Champagnes included the [Billecart-Salmon Champagne Le Clos St.-Hilaire Brut 2008](#), [Charles Heidsieck Champagne Blanc des Millénaires Brut 1996](#), [de Venoge Champagne Louis XV Brut Rosé 2018](#), [Taittinger Champagne Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2014](#), [Dom Pérignon Champagne Rosé Vintage 2010](#), [Dom Pérignon Champagne P2 1995](#), [Pierre Paillard Champagne Bouzy Grand Cru Les Mottelettes Blanc de Blancs 2021](#) and [Salon Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs 2015](#).



The just-released **Roederer** Cristal 2008 earned a perfect rating. (James Suckling photo)

TOP 100 VALUE WINES 2025

Senior Editor Aldo Fiordelli tastes at Champagne Dom Ruinart with chef de cave Caroline Fiot. (Aldo Fiordelli photo)



From those tasting results, it may seem difficult to generalize about what our favorite Champagnes have in common, but we certainly have an affinity for top vintages and blanc de blancs.

Indeed, the Cote des Blancs is making some of its best wines ever. Champagne producers are looking for more and more top chardonnay to balance their blends and maintain freshness in their wines. It also doesn't hurt that many producers are blocking malolactic fermentation to retain higher acidity, although some say this can change the character of the wines too much, imparting a slight greenness.

Regardless, the fact that top chardonnay grapes command some of the highest prices in Champagne reflects both their quality and continued demand. Hotter and drier vintages are also producing some extraordinary chardonnay, particularly in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, which for me is the most complete Grand Cru village in Champagne. I like to compare the best blanc de blancs Champagnes to Grand Cru Burgundy.

As Vincent Chaperon quipped, "If we can do Montrachet in every place, then of course we will have a top Champagne."



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James tastes with Didier Depond, the president of Champagne Salon and Champagne Delamotte. (James Suckling photo)



An older vintage of Victoire Champagne currently sells for about \$100. (James Suckling photo)

In fact, Didier Depond, the president of Champagne Salon and Champagne Delamotte, told me about an amusing tasting a few years ago with Aubert de Villaine of Domaine de la Romanee-Conti. Depond was serving Salon, and de Villaine kept saying, "Give me another glass of your Montrachet."

During my weeklong trip, I also heard many Champagne producers promoting their blanc de noirs, mostly pure pinot noir bottlings. They are obviously trying to build demand for the category. In general, I find many blanc de noirs better suited to accompanying a meal than drinking on their own because they can be rich and structured.

I keep asking myself: Will blanc de noirs become the new blanc de blancs?

Anything is possible with Champagne. And with all that structure, many of these wines will certainly age for years after release.

– James Suckling, Editor & CEO

The list of wines below is comprised of bottles tasted and rated by the JamesSuckling.com tasting team. They include many latest releases not yet available on the market, but which will be available soon.

Note: You can sort the wines below by score, vintage and alphabetically by winery name. You can also search for specific wines in the search bar.

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SCORE (HIGHEST TO LOWEST)



BILLECART-SALMON CHAMPAGNE L'EXCELLENCE 2002



CHARLES HEIDSIECK CHAMPAGNE BLANC DES MILLÉNAIRES BRUT 2017



DOM PÉRIGNON CHAMPAGNE P2 2008



LOUIS ROEDERER CHAMPAGNE CRISTAL LATE RELEASE MAGNUM 2008



PIPER HEIDSIECK CHAMPAGNE RARE 2012



SALON CHAMPAGNE BRUT BLANC DE BLANCS 1996	✓
BILLECART-SALMON CHAMPAGNE LE CLOS ST.-HILAIRE BRUT 2008	✓
CHARLES HEIDSIECK CHAMPAGNE BLANC DES MILLÉNAIRES BRUT 1996	✓
DE VENOGE CHAMPAGNE LOUIS XV BRUT ROSÉ 2018	✓
DOM PÉRIGNON CHAMPAGNE P2 1995	✓
DOM PÉRIGNON CHAMPAGNE ROSÉ VINTAGE 2010	✓
PIERRE PAILLARD CHAMPAGNE BOUZY GRAND CRU LES MOTTELETTES BLANC DE BLANCS 2021	✓
SALON CHAMPAGNE BRUT BLANC DE BLANCS 2015	✓
TAITTINGER CHAMPAGNE COMTES DE CHAMPAGNE BLANC DE BLANCS 2014	✓
BOLLINGER CHAMPAGNE Aÿ LA CÔTE AUX ENFANTS 2016	✓
CHARLES HEIDSIECK CHAMPAGNE BLANC DES MILLÉNAIRES BRUT 2007	✓
CHARLES HEIDSIECK CHAMPAGNE BLANC DES MILLÉNAIRES BRUT 2014	✓
DOM PÉRIGNON CHAMPAGNE 2017	✓
DOM PÉRIGNON CHAMPAGNE P2 2005	✓
DOMAINE VINCEY COTEAUX CHAMPENOIS BLANC COTEAUX CHARDONNAY GRAND CRU 2019	✓

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