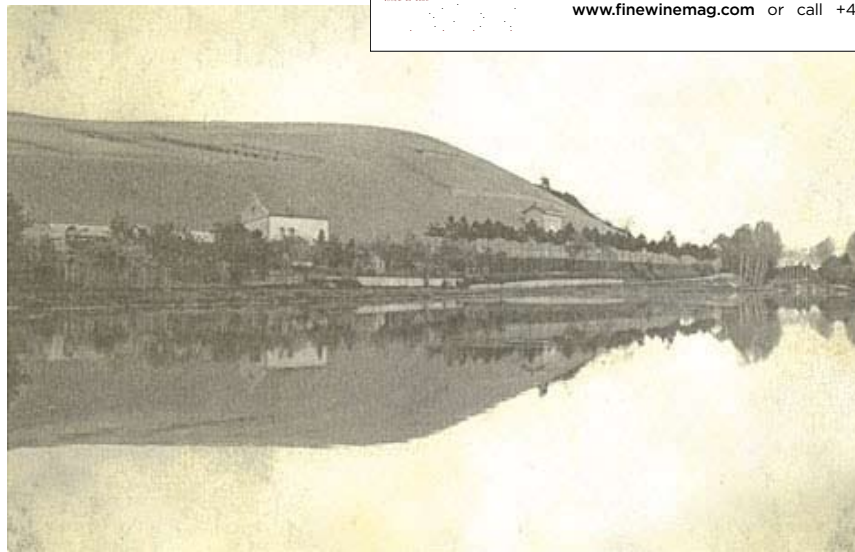


**FOR BETTER OR WORSE:  
CLOS DES GOISSES  
1951-1998**

by Tom Stevenson

There were just two weeks to go, and all 45 places on my Christie's Champagne Masterclass in December of last year had been sold, yet no one had any idea what we would be tasting. Least of all me. Lucy Marshall, the marketing manager at Christie's Education, was diplomatically fending off enquiries from ticketholders who, not unreasonably, wanted to know what they would be getting for their money. With two books published in 2007, I had not got around to giving the subject of my annual masterclass much thought, let alone embarked upon any action to secure the Champagnes. The mystery this inadvertently caused heightened the expectations of regular ticketholders, who were already accustomed to some exceptional masterclass lineups, so I knew I had to pull something special out the bag. In such a short timescale, it would have been logistical madness to approach more than one producer, but who should that producer be, and why?

While I pondered these questions, I poured myself a glass of Pol Roger 1999. Pol Roger was one of the producers with whom I could have arranged all sorts of tastings, and one I knew could and would have helped me out at the last moment. Ironically, it was the thought of Pol Roger's 1999 being even better than its superb 1998 that eventually set my thoughts off on a tangent away from this house. Most 1999s, as good as they are, are not better than the 1998s, which led me to consider why a slightly superior Champagne can be produced in slightly lesser years. This can be because some areas fare better than others; therefore whether one producer's 1998 or 1999 is better might depend on where that producer's vineyards are and/or where that producer buys grapes. It is just as likely, however, that it is merely a matter of selection. The quality of vintage Champagne is primarily achieved through selection, and the poorer the year, the more rigorous the selection necessary. Pol Roger's 1998 was so good that the new *chef de caves*, Dominique Petit (ex-Krug), who replaced James Coffinet in 1999, probably



Franjou's famous view of Clos des Goisses c.1910, bearing an uncanny resemblance to a Champagne bottle

felt obliged to be even stricter in his selection of the vintage that year if he was to establish his credentials with his new employers. It would be another ten years before I could do a Petit vs Coffinet vertical, so I turned my thoughts to why certain areas are better some years than others. It's true to say that someone somewhere produces a great wine every year in Champagne, but that someone and somewhere are not the same person or place—with one exception. There is a plot of land in Champagne so blessed in location and aspect that it can achieve a good level of natural ripeness year in and year out: Clos des Goisses. Then I remembered Charles Philipponnat being unable to supply some old vintages for a dinner because he had "so few left," but saying that he might change his mind for a "special" tasting. So I fired off an e-mail to see if my Christie's Champagne Masterclass was "special" enough.

After a flurry of e-mails, the deal was done, and with it the sigh of relief from Christie's Education was almost audible. Lucy Marshall could now tell ticketholders that their faith would be repaid by a vertical of 13 vintages of Clos des Goisses stretching back 56 years. No one was happier that Steven Spurrier, the founder of wine courses for Christie's Education, who e-mailed me: "This is fantastic! I love Clos des Goisses but drink it very seldom. It has a special place in my heart, as in 1968, the year Bella and I were married, we spent a couple of days in Champagne and at a small but chic restaurant (in

Hautvillers, I think) my choice for lunch was Clos des Goisses 1959, which I (almost) remember to this day." Well, there you go—I thought I was one of the first to dig out obscure gems in Champagne nearly 30 years ago, but there was Spurrier guzzling Clos des Goisses—and a 1959 at that—a good decade earlier!

**A matter of terroir**

Clos des Goisses has always been one of the most extraordinary jewels in Champagne's crown, but Spurrier notwithstanding it was still an obscure gem indeed when I stumbled across it in 1980. I first heard about Clos des Goisses at Salon (which was equally obscure in 1980), where the late Colin Fenton MW was intrigued that my researches had brought me to this tiny house after just two weeks in Champagne. A lifetime devotee of Salon, he was as pleased as Punch by my appreciation of that exceptional and very special Champagne, and it led him to speculate whether I had tasted Clos des Goisses. I confessed not, and he explained that although there were huge contrasts between the two Champagnes—one being a Marne Valley Pinot Noir-dominated blend, the other a Côte des Blancs Chardonnay—they "both share a certain specificity that makes them special." Fenton believed that anyone who did not appreciate Salon could not appreciate Clos des Goisses, and vice versa. Over the past 28 years I have found this observation to be true, and it is the appreciation of the specificity



This article by *The World of Fine Wine* may not be sold, altered in any way, or circulated without this statement.

Every issue of *The World of Fine Wine* features coverage of the world's finest wines in their historical and cultural context, along with news, reviews, interviews and comprehensive international auction results. For further information, and to subscribe to *The World of Fine Wine*, please visit [www.fineninemag.com](http://www.fineninemag.com) or call +44 1795 414681.

Image courtesy of Tom Stevenson

of these two great Champagnes that separates the true aficionado from regular Champagne drinkers. What Fenton meant by specificity was, of course, terroir—a term that was not bandied about so freely by Anglo-Saxon speakers in 1980, even though Hugh Johnson's *Wine Atlas* had been surreptitiously spreading a sense of place amongst literate wine consumers since as early as 1969.

Contrary to popular belief, Champagne is probably the greatest expression of terroir in the world. Terroir in Champagne is, however, a matter of degree. Even the largest-volume Champagne blend is a terroir wine. Nowhere else in the world is such a wine possible. If that's not terroir, then what is? It is the ability of Champagne to express a uniqueness of product from such a large region that confirms its greatness as a *vin de terroir*. Champagne blends from districts within the region are capable of expressing a more defined terroir, such as that of the Montagne de Reims, Côte des Blancs, Sézannais, or Aube. It is possible to subdivide Champagne's district level terroir even further—into Grande Montagne and Petit Montagne, say, for pure Pinot Noir, or Eastern Montagne, Côte des Blancs, and Sézannais for Chardonnay. Then, of course, we encounter more specific degrees of terroir as we go from mono-crus such as Salon from Le Mesnil-sur-Oger to single-vineyard Champagnes such as Clos du Mesnil and, of course, Clos des Goisses.

### Mareuil-sur-Aÿ

Clos des Goisses is located in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, one of the truly great growths of Champagne, rated at an *échelle* of 99 percent. The vineyards in this region are classed on a village-by-village basis using a supposedly percentile system known as the *Echelle des Crus*, which classifies grands crus at the maximum *échelle* of 100 percent, and premiers crus between 90 and 99 percent. Due to various ad hoc reclassifications and political manipulations, however, the very minimum *échelle* has gradually increased from 22.5 percent at the beginning of the 19th century to 80 percent today. So, while Parker's much maligned percentile scoring is based on just 50 points,

Champagne's *Echelle des Crus* is nothing more than a 20-point scale!

Moreover, Champagne's *Echelle des Crus* does not have Parker's reliability. Love the man or hate him, even his greatest critics know what to expect from a Parker score, while the *Echelle des Crus* is probably the most misguided, misleading, and erroneous official ranking in the world. Some of Champagne's 17 grands crus do not deserve their status. Chouilly, for example, was only elevated to grand cru status in 1985 because it was home to the powerful CVC super-cooperative. Mareuil-sur-Aÿ would have been a much more deserving case, but had no political clout. Prior to the EU's ruling that price-fixing in Champagne was illegal, the *Echelle des Crus* had become nothing more than a glorified shopping list, and a politically biased one at that. Since the introduction of a free market, the *Echelle des Crus* has clearly had its day, and with an expansion of the appellation underway, there is talk of reclassifying the existing areas of Champagne as part of the transparency that will be needed to justify the classification of any new vineyards. It is therefore a distinct possibility that Champagne's vineyards could be classified honestly on a plot-by-plot basis as in the Côte d'Or, rather than on an inherently inaccurate village-by-village basis as they do in Beaujolais. Should this happen, there is no doubt that a significant chunk of Chouilly would be demoted to premier cru, whereas a good proportion of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ would be promoted to grand cru.

### Not really a *clos*

The steep slope of Les Goisses (as it was originally known) in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ is such a prominent feature on the landscape that it is impossible to miss when entering the village from the east. Goisses is the feminine plural form of the adjective *gois* in the old Champenois dialect, and *gois* means something inclined or slanted. In Champagne, *gois* always refers to an exceptionally steep slope. There is a wall along part of the bottom of Les Goisses, but it is a retaining wall, not a *clos* in the true sense. A true *clos*, such as Krug's Clos du Mesnil or Clos d'Ambonnay, is found on flat or barely sloping land, where the wall completely encloses the vineyard, affording it substantial protection from

the elements. Walk into a true *clos* on a sunny but breezy day, and when you feel the stillness, the increase in temperature, and see the lazy meandering of airborne insect life, you grasp the importance of its artificial mesoclimate. A *clos* turns what would otherwise be an ordinary terroir into something special. Without such protection, particularly in Champagne's marginal climate, a single vineyard has to have a very special, natural terroir in order to stand out—and Les Goisses (or Clos des Goisses as the wine is now known) certainly has that. The unbroken steep slope of this 5.5 ha (13.6-acre) vineyard is so fully south-facing that it is often referred to as south-south-facing. It rises at a gradient of 30–45° from 80 to 105 m (262–344 ft), and on average is 1.5°C (2.7°F) hotter than the surrounding vineyards. To find a regional microclimate of this heat, you would have to travel 250 miles (400 km) south to Burgundy. Taking into consideration all the factors that affect quality, there can be no doubt that Clos des Goisses boasts the most climatically distinct, naturally occurring, and expressive terroir in Champagne.

### Down-to-earth terroir

The topsoil of Clos des Goisses is different to that in the surrounding vineyards. All over Mareuil-sur-Aÿ the topsoil consists of clay with a siliceous content and some dark, crumbly, rendzine that develops naturally under grass over chalk; but on Clos des Goisses, where the topsoil would naturally be just 2–3 in (5–8 cm) deep, due to erosion, the topsoil is in fact 10–20 in (25–50 cm) deep, thanks to centuries of manure that man has dumped on this constantly eroding, very steep slope. The liming effect from the subsoil on the humus that has built up through manuring has created a natural nutrient production cycle which, with the higher temperature, gives the wine its exceptional power, structure, and intensity, while the higher active lime content (30 percent compared to 25 percent throughout the rest of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) imparts a certain spiciness and minerality that makes it closer in style to wines from Aÿ (the most calcareous Pinot Noir growth in Champagne, with 35–40 percent active lime) than to the rounder, more mellow wines that are more typical of this village.

## Origins

Although known since the earliest viticultural times as an exceptional terroir, Les Goisses did not emerge as a Champagne in its own right until it was purchased by the Philipponnat family in 1935. The Philipponnats had been established in the Marne Valley since at least the 16th century, though it was not until the mid-19th century that they began growing grapes and making wine. It was in Aÿ that the Philipponnats first became involved in the Champagne trade, moving to Mareuil-sur-Aÿ in 1912 to set up the house of Philipponnat at its present location. In 1935, Philipponnat purchased 6ha (14.8 acres) of vines on the Mareuil hill, including 5.5ha (13.6 acres) known as Les Goisses, and immediately vinified its wine separately. It is not known exactly when the first vintage was released, but Charles Philipponnat, the present day PDG of Champagne Philipponnat, believes that it was probably sometime during World War II. The early vintages were labeled simply Vin des Goisses or Les Goisses, as it was not until 1956 that Clos des Goisses was conceived. It was Raymond Beaudoin, the founder of *Revue du Vin de France*, who suggested this name to Pierre Philipponnat, Charles Philipponnat's great uncle. When Charles kindly shared the firm's solitary oldest bottle, the 1947, over dinner after the Christie's Masterclass, he was surprised that it was labeled Clos des Goisses, though all this meant was that it had been released in or after 1956. Unfortunately it had the color and aroma of Sherry, with no fruit or bubbles. Although he claimed to find some minerality still evident in the wine, I felt he was grasping at straws. He was disappointed, and understandably so, for it was the oldest relic of this great wine in his cellars. But it was historically, not recently, disgorged (that is, disgorged at the time of the regular release) and had quite obviously been in distribution at one time—death for any old Champagne vintage. Charles believed that it had not left the cellars, but Champagne Philipponnat has been under its current ownership (Boizel Chanoine Champagne) only since 1997, so he could not know this for sure, and the previous owners, Marie Brizard, had been scouring the world for old vintages in the early 1990s.

## Clos des Goisses should always be declared, for better or worse

One of the most remarkable qualities of Clos des Goisses is its ability to produce great Champagne in even the most dire years, having missed only 12 out of 73 vintages. With its “south-south-facing” slope, the sun's rays are virtually perpendicular and undiluted for most of the day, and its grapes have been known to “roast” on the vine, making the hottest years more of a problem than so-called off-vintages. The real question is why did Clos des Goisses miss out on as many as 12 vintages? My theory is that between 1963 and 1987 the owners lost sight of what a terroir like Clos des Goisses really means. To explain this, it helps to list all the years of Clos des Goisses's commercial existence, by decade, with the non-declared years highlighted in red, followed by the time spans of the *chefs de caves*:

1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007

1913–1962	Louis Boland
1962–1970	Achille Souply
1971–1986	Armand Husson
1986–1998	Norbert Thiébert
1998–	Thierry Garnier

It is not possible to blame any particular *chef de caves* for failure to exploit the potential of Clos des Goisses, because commercial decisions are ultimately the proprietor's responsibility, but one *chef de caves* should be recognized for spotting and realizing the extraordinary potential of this vineyard in the first place. That *chef de caves* is, of course, the legendary Louis Boland. Born in 1887, and a pharmacist and biologist by training, Boland was effectively a consultant winemaker at a time when enologists did not exist. He owned the pharmacy in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, as did his father before him, and both men used this pharmacy as a winemaking laboratory. Louis Boland

was consulted by many local producers, and in this capacity he invented the *colle Boland*, the very first bentonite-alginate riddling agent, but he was also Philipponnat's official *chef de caves* from 1913 until 1962. It was Boland who persuaded Pierre Philipponnat to buy Les Goisses in 1935, when the owner, the Société Générale de Champagne, went bankrupt. As you can see from the declared vintages above, Boland was fully aware of this vineyard's ability to produce great Champagne in almost any year, missing just two vintages: 1944 and 1954. Neither of these years was a generally declared vintage, but both were easily within the capabilities of Les Goisses to excel. All the same, with General Patton and his 3rd Army sweeping into Champagne on August 28, 1944, we can forgive Boland for the absence of any vintage that year. There are no records, but perhaps the grapes had been shot up in a skirmish, or, after four years of occupation, maybe he had more important things on his mind. As for 1954, the harvest turned out better than expected, thus it really is a bit of a mystery why Boland did not vinify that year separately. The vintages he did produce, however, represent the best record of all Philipponnat *chefs de caves* for exploiting this vineyard's come-hell-or-high-water potential to the full, and his 1952 is probably the greatest Clos des Goisses of all.

From the cluster of highlighted undeclared years, it is evident that Champagne Philipponnat lost its way with the *raison d'être* of this vineyard between 1963 and 1987. Most of these missing years were not generally declared, but were well within the capability of Clos des Goisses to succeed, and there are a number of truly great 1981s—so why not one from this exceptional terroir? Only 1963, 1972, and 1984 produced such rotten grapes that the wines stank and you might excuse Philipponnat for not having a go—yet it is precisely in such vintages that true devotees of this very special Champagne would want to see how Clos des Goisses fared. The house was still under family ownership until 1980, through Pierre Philipponnat's son-in-law Michel Collard, father of the well-known pianist Jean-Philippe Collard. I have great memories of sharing a magnum of 1951 Clos des





Photography by Jon Wyand

The exceptionally steep slope of south-facing Clos des Goisses is one of the many features that make it such a special site



Goisses with Michel's other son, Dominique, in the depths of Philipponnat's cellars in 1983. When I spotted a small stack of 1951 magnums it was the first time I had seen a Champagne bearing my birth year (because it was such a lousy vintage!), so I brazenly asked whether I could taste it. Dominique told me that it would have to be opened *à la volée*, and because it was early evening he would have to ask Armand Husson, the *chef de caves*, the next day. Could I come back? I couldn't, but I told him I could open a bottle *à la volée*. In fact, I could sabre a Champagne bottle without a sabre, just the back edge of a table knife, but I had only opened fairly young bottles *à la volée* and did not realize that the head of a 30-year-old cork is quite likely to break off in the process. So there I was, holding a magnum upside down, trying not to disturb the sediment, while Dominique set off in search of a cork screw. Do you know how useless, and therefore rare, a corkscrew is in Champagne? Twenty minutes later, after begging from neighbors, Dominique returned with the corkscrew, and took the magnum from me while I slid underneath and proceeded to screw the device upward into what remained of the cork. The trick of opening *à la volée* is, of course, to time bringing the bottle to an upright position as the cork (or crown cap these days) is removed, so that the sediment is forced out with as little loss of wine as possible. Which is not as easy as it sounds, especially when you are lying on the floor nervously extracting a cork with the pressure of a double-decker bus tire behind it, and someone else is holding the

bottle. One almighty crack and we were both covered in sediment, and almost one third of the magnum's contents. But the rest was as clear as spring water, and we sat on the floor giggling away like two naughty boys as we consumed one of the most memorable Champagnes of our lives.

Ironically, it was because Clos des Goisses could produce such a great wine even in 1951 that Michel Collard sought to make this single-vineyard Champagne even more special by restricting its production to only the best years. For almost every other Champagne ever produced, this would be the most admirable of strategies; but for Clos des Goisses, I believe it was the wrong decision. When I taste what has been achieved in 2001, and I know how special 1951 was for at least the first 42 years of its life; and I calibrate that against the tasting experience accumulated over almost 30 years of specializing in Champagne, there seems to me to be only one option for Clos des Goisses—and that is to produce it every single year. The whole *raison d'être* of vinifying Clos des Goisses separately should be to illustrate just how special its terroir is, no matter what Champagne's marginal climate can throw at it.

For all the right reasons, the Collards got it wrong. They continued running the business after it was purchased by Gosset in 1980 and for the first two years of ownership by Marie Brizard, who purchased Philipponnat in 1987, thus devotees of Clos des Goisses will forever be denied the opportunity to see how its terroir could rise above the rest of Champagne in ten of its 12 missing

vintages. On the other hand, thanks to Michel Collard's efforts to make Clos des Goisses even more special, we have him to thank for perhaps the bulk of this vineyard's greatest vintages.

When Paul Couvreur took the helm in 1989, Clos des Goisses became Marie Brizard's top priority. From a quality point of view, Couvreur made very few mistakes, but his management style was old Champagne, with quite unsupportable manning levels, so he also made few profits. Eventually Marie Brizard was forced to sell, which is where the current owners, BCC, come in. BCC chairman Bruno Paillard purchased Champagne Philipponnat in November 1997, and he did so in flamboyant fashion. Just one week before signing contracts, he walked out of talks with Marie Brizard, when the unions refused to accept his terms, which included halving the workforce to make Philipponnat profitable. The unions threatened to take to court any owner who made its members redundant, even though the ailing Marie Brizard group no longer had the financial resources to keep Philipponnat afloat and without a new owner the company would have gone bust, with every person it employed losing their jobs. Even after Paillard had walked out and no other realistic offers were forthcoming, the unions still did not budge, so it surprised everyone when Paillard ignored the inevitability of a messy legal battle and purchased Philipponnat on his own terms within days of officially withdrawing from negotiations. In the months that followed, BCC faced 20 separate legal cases, but



Within Les Goisses there are 11 *lieux-dits*, subdivided in-house by Philipponnat into 14 plots

Paillard's brinkmanship won the day. He had paid redundancy money in excess of the legal minimum, leaving the unions no case to plead in court. The sale also included Abel Lepitre (its premises in Reims were quickly sold off, and production moved to Chanoine in Murigny), but it was Philipponnat's Clos des Goisses that had made the deal too sweet to walk away from, and Paillard's masterstroke was to appoint Charles Philipponnat, an executive director at Moët & Chandon, to head the former family firm.

Charles Philipponnat's greatest contributions to this house have been both structural and stylistic. On the structural side, he has built a new centralized press house and cuverie, which enable Philipponnat to carry out all vintage operations in one location within a 5-mile (8km) radius of its vineyards. The stylistic changes hark back rather than breaking new ground, and the most important include a repositioning of Philipponnat's dependence on Grande Vallée and Southern Montagne Pinot Noir, no malolactic, and a return in part to barrique fermentation, using relatively new oak (2–5 years old) in minority proportions (20–25 percent for Non-Vintage, 30–35 percent for Vintage, and 35–45 percent for Clos des Goisses). The result has been a range of wines that have gastronomic value rather than Champagnes per se, and that makes every one of Champagne Philipponnat wines difficult to appreciate under blind tasting conditions. Tasted blind side-by-side with other Champagnes, Philipponnat cuvées

stick out like sore thumbs, appearing to have more character than class, and more flavor than finesse. With the exception of Clos des Goisses, which screams class and finesse, I confess that I have often marked down Philipponnat cuvées under blind conditions, only to realize, once I get sight of the crib sheet, that I prefer these Champagnes far more than my scores indicate. When tasted in situ at Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, or at the table, their worth becomes abundantly clear. The more I repeat this humbling experience, the more it reinforces my belief that although blind tasting is an extremely useful tool, it is by no means perfect for every job.

### The evolution of Clos des Goisses

Original documents are the perfect tool for serious research, but no records exist for the composition of the earliest vintages of Clos des Goisses. The 1951, 1952, 1959, 1961, and 1964 vintages all taste as if they were at least 50 percent Chardonnay or, perhaps, slightly Chardonnay dominant. It is difficult to estimate on tasting alone because even 25 years ago, when I first tasted some of these vintages, they were all mature (the youngest being 19 years old) and Chardonnay increasingly dominates any Champagne with time. On the other hand, I have to factor in the effect of true Clos des Goisses Pinot Noir, which is exceptionally powerful, and has a greater impact on a blend than Pinot Noir grown almost anywhere else in the region. From the mid-1960s, it would appear that the proportion of Pinot Noir in Clos des Goisses increased until, by the 1980s, it was 70 percent according to

Michel Collard. Under Marie Brizard the amount of Pinot Noir dropped to between 60 and 65 percent (the 1996 was a 50/50 anomaly), but this trend was reversed by Charles Philipponnat, who has gradually taken it back up to 70 percent, which is what he believes a Grande Vallée terroir should reflect.

The yield for Clos des Goisses is very modest in Champagne terms, averaging around 10,000 kilos per hectare. Even in a record year like 2004, when Champagne averaged a massive 23,000 kilos, it was just 12,000 (Pinot Noir) to 13,000 (Chardonnay) for Clos des Goisses. In a tiny vintage like 2003, when Champagne averaged just 8,250 kilos, Clos des Goisses yielded a mere 700–1,200 kilos, depending on the parcel. The vinification has changed over the years, but chaptalization has never been necessary, and malolactic has always been avoided. In recent decades much if not all of the wine was vinified in large wooden *foudres*, but since the 2000 harvest between 30 and 45 percent of the wine has been fermented in 225-liter barriques of between two and five years of prior use. The first fermentation takes place at 68°F (20°C), the wine is cold-stabilized, kept on fine lees, and racked once before the *assemblage* in March. Following a light filtration, the wine is bottled in April or May, and stored in the coolest part of Philipponnat's cellars, where it undergoes second fermentation at 54°F (12°C). Most vintages receive a *dosage* of 4.5g of residual sugar per liter and nine months post-disgorgement aging prior to shipment.



Only Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are grown on Les Goisses, though the balance has shifted over the years in favor of the former

### Clos des Goisses vertical

The best way to illustrate how a terroir excels even in the worst vintages is to start and finish on bad years, so I asked Charles Philipponnat if I could start the Christie's Masterclass tasting with 2001 (a vintage that "only an idiot would declare") and end on 1951 (my year of birth and "a lousy vintage"). I also chose two different disgorgements of one vintage (1998) and the same disgorgement of the same vintage (1989) in different formats (75cl bottle and magnum). The choice of these vintages was forced on me by the restricted availability of my own requests (different disgorgements, different formats), and together with the opening and closing wines this left me just seven other vintages spread over 56 years to choose from. It was an impossible choice, so I selected certain years that compared or contrasted with others. Most of the Champagnes were disgorged specially for the tasting on December 11, 2007. All predictions of how any vintage will develop and when best to drink it are subject to ideal storage conditions, of course. In order to give readers a fuller picture, I have inserted brief grayed-out notes on intervening vintages.

#### Clos des Goisses 2004

Classic Clos des Goisses structure and acidity, with a sweetness of ripe grapes not noted in most Champagnes of this vintage. Will be a fine Clos des Goisses.

#### Clos des Goisses 2003

Like a Montrachet with bubbles! Softest of mousses. Will be a very special Clos des Goisses.

#### Clos des Goisses 2002

A star in the making, combining classic Clos des Goisses structure with exotic fruit. Will be a great, great Clos des Goisses.

#### Clos des Goisses 2001

*Disgorged November 27, 2007*

*Dosage 4.5g/l*

This was one of Champagne's most vilified vintages, due to an oversized, underripe crop and one of the wettest harvests on record, but Clos des Goisses showed its mettle due to its modest yield and unique exposure, which ripened the grapes to a vintage-worthy 10.5% before it rained. Quality was enhanced through selection, to produce only 5,000 bottles out of a potential of 50,000, whereas the average bottling for Clos des Goisses is 15,000–20,000. The masterclass was very privileged to taste this wine, as consumers never get the chance to taste a Champagne before it is launched, particularly one that is several years away from being released, and especially from a vintage with 2001's infamous reputation. It was a risk, but one that Charles Philipponnat was happy to take for Christie's Masterclass,



and in the sure knowledge of how well the 2001 would show. The 2001's fresh aromas and seductively soft, elegant fruit make it very deceptive because it is a Champagne that will still be drinking well in 20 years time. Most Clos des Goisses need 10–15 years before they even start to show their potential complexity, but this will be an early developer. Regardless of when this will be released, it will be ready to drink (not just starting to show its potential) in just ten years, but will be even better ten years on, and will not lose its fruit and freshness for at least another ten years after that. As with all lighter vintages of Clos des Goisses, the 2001 has great focus, a special purity of fruit, and shows more minerality than spicy-complexity. Typically fine mousse. Drink 2011–2031.

#### Clos des Goisses 2000

The lush pineapple fruit now will translate into one of Clos des Goisses's more succulent renditions by the time it is released. Has finesse, and will be a fine and forward Clos des Goisses.

#### Clos des Goisses 1999

Another lush, tropical rendition. Will be a fine and forward Clos des Goisses.

#### Clos des Goisses 1999 Juste Rosé

The first Rosé from this vineyard, and a very delicate one it is, too, yet there is a lingering Clos des Goisses potential about this wine. No one has any idea yet how this will develop, but I have a feeling that it could be quite magical.

#### Clos des Goisses 1998

*Disgorged November 27, 2007*

*Dosage 4.5g/l*

I chose 1998 to contrast against the 1997, as these two vintages are of similar age, and were of similar quality on paper. Although 1997s seemed to have the edge at harvest (higher ripeness and higher acidity), there are many more great bottles of 1998 than there are of 1997. The recent disgorgement was not kind to this vintage, highlighting aldehydic aromas that will not be present after nine months post-disgorgement aging. (Some disgorgements of the same Champagne can be very aldehydic, while others are fresh, flowery, and acacia-like). There is no hiding, however, the big, bold, bright Pinot Noir in this wine. It's always there, and it always comes hurtling through

on the palate, and with time on second cork will go mellow-biscuity on the palate with a complexing touch of spice and dried fruits on the finish. Great intensity. Ultra-fine bubbles. Great Clos des Goisses. Drink 2013–2053.

#### Clos des Goisses 1997

*Disgorged November 27, 2007*

*Dosage 4.5g/l*

Generally this vintage has more minerality, but less fruit than the 1998, and not quite in the same class, though that is relative to the exceptional breeding of Clos des Goisses, and this does not lack class or indeed fruit as such. The minerality is particularly noticeable as a Chardonnay-influenced, creamy-walnutty complexity underlying Pinot Noir fruit mid-palate. The recent disgorgement has been much kinder to this vintage, adding fresh acacia aromas to the nose. (When exactly the same Champagne is disgorged at different times, the level of individual amino acids will vary. As amino acids are the precursors to aromas that are essential for the complex development of a Champagne, different disgorgements can lead to Champagnes of different character and quality. At the time of disgorgement, Champagne is in a highly reductive state, but this makes it particularly prone to oxygen. Dependant on numerous factors, including the presence of reducing enzymes from autolysis, and sugar and sulfur dioxide from the *dosage*, the same Champagne can have a variable sensitivity to oxidative aromas at different disgorgement dates.) Very fine Clos des Goisses. Drink 2010–2040.

#### Clos des Goisses 1997

*Disgorged October 2006*

*Dosage 4.5g/l*

This earlier disgorgement has allowed creamy-oak aromas to emerge, and has emphasized the Chardonnay's role in this wine, softening the powerful fruit on the palate, showing more minerality on the finish. Silky mousse. Very fine Clos des Goisses. Drink now to 2040.

#### Clos des Goisses 1996

The last time I tasted this vintage it did not show very well at all, but has been "mind-boggling" and "stunning" in the past, so judgement reserved.

#### Clos des Goisses 1995

This has evolved slowly from a very fine Clos des Goisses to a great, great one.

#### Clos des Goisses 1994

This vintage was made but never released.

#### Clos des Goisses 1993

The initial edge this wine showed over the 1995 has been overtaken by the progress of the latter vintage, but this remains a very fine Clos des Goisses.



**Clos des Goisses 1992**

An exotic expression of Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1991**

Creamy-peachy fruit with toasty top notes. A fine Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1990**

*Disgorged February 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

A stunning wine with succulent, creamy-rich Chardonnay fruit in ascendance, and smoky-spicy, yeast-complexed Pinot Noir fruit on the finish. Dreamy mousse, with a lazy stream of almost microscopic bubbles. Although luscious and satisfyingly *à point*, this vintage is only just getting into its stride, and will develop a spicy, dried-fruit, and Christmas cake complexity in its next phase of development. I chose 1990 to contrast against the 1989, as these two vintages are of similar age. The 1990 was initially perceived throughout the region as superior to 1989 by miles, yet a number of famous 1990s have gone over or, most optimistically, have gone into an ungainly phase from which it is hoped they will emerge. Conversely, some of the 1989s have shown surprising longevity and freshness. The 1990 Clos des Goisses is a great, great 1990, and a great, great Clos des Goisses. Drink now to 2050.

**Clos des Goisses 1989**

*Disgorged February 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

Not in the same class as the 1990, but extraordinarily fresh and, surprisingly, fresher than the magnum of the same vintage disgorged at exactly the same time. Very fine Clos des Goisses. Drink now to 2020.

**Clos des Goisses 1989** (En Magnum)

*Disgorged February 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

Although the 75cl bottle tasted fresher, this magnum did not lack freshness, it was just very much richer, fatter, and even better! This is a deep and powerful wine, with a commanding presence on the palate, and crystallized fruit complexity on the finish. An outstanding example of a very fine Clos des Goisses. Drink now to 2025.

**Clos des Goisses 1988**

Profoundly complete, utterly beguiling. A great, great Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1986**

This was not an exceptional vintage, but the terroir makes an exceptional 1986. Fine Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1985**

Only outclassed by the likes of 1964 or 1952. A great, great Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1983**

Gradually achieving *gravitas*. Very fine.

**Clos des Goisses 1982**

*Disgorged August 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

While some 1982s have now gone over the hill, this wine is still firmly stuck in its first stage of development, with an extraordinarily pale color; rich, oak-laden aromas (which can only come from the large, old oak *foudres*), and vividly pure, exquisitely ripe fruit on the palate. In fact the ripeness of fruit was so great that even the minimal *dosage* was quite noticeable! The cushiony mousse adds to the finesse. This has evolved from a very fine Clos des Goisses that has always promised exceptional longevity into a truly great Clos des Goisses. Drink now to 2030.

**Clos des Goisses 1980**

This still is one of the three best 1980 Champagnes. A very fine Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1979**

Apart from a couple of off-bottles, this is a slow-evolving, beautifully ripe and elegant Champagne. A great Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1978**

I have never had a good bottle of this vintage, though others apparently have.

**Clos des Goisses 1976** (En Magnum)

*Disgorged 27 November 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

This was disappointing on the nose for a wine that has, to quote myself “constantly proved itself to be one of the greatest vintages of Clos des Goisses.” Others in the Masterclass appreciated it, but I was expecting its trademark bouquet of hugely tropical, exotic fruits, and merely got a touch of geranium. The palate was exceedingly rich, as might be expected, with impressive acids for this vintage. It is impossible to rate the greatness and longevity of 1976 Clos des Goisses based on this tasting, but on previous occasions it has definitely established itself as a great Clos des Goisses with decades ahead of it. Judgement reserved.

**Clos des Goisses 1975**

*Disgorged February 2006*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

This also was not the best example of this vintage I have tasted, and having been disgorged 21 months is no excuse for a great Clos des Goisses that until a few years ago at least still showed its class in bottles that were historically disgorged. Judgement reserved.

**Clos des Goisses 1973**

A light, more mineral vintage. But still a fine Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1971**

This was richer and spicier than the 1973. A very fine Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1970**

A fine, mineral Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1966**

Lighter than the 1964, but not necessarily a lesser wine. A great, great Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1964** (En Magnum)

*Disgorged 27 November 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

This was the star of the entire tasting. On absolutely cracking form, the 1964 in magnum displayed such amazing youth, vitality, and freshness that I wondered how it would have performed against the 1966, which has always been the fresher, more lively of these two great Clos des Goisses vintages. It is hard to imagine that the 1966 could have had more vigor and vivacity than this 1964. The balance of the 1964 is impeccable; it seems so light in the mouth for such a fabulously rich wine, with great depth, length, and finesse of fruit. This is possibly the most evenly balanced vintage of them between minerality and spicy complexity. Heavenly, velvety mousse. A great, great Clos des Goisses. Drink now to 2020.

**Clos des Goisses 1959**

A great, great Clos des Goisses.

**Clos des Goisses 1952**

*Disgorged 27 November 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

Probably the greatest Clos des Goisses ever produced. With its exquisite richness of fruit, impeccable balance and finesse, its silky mousse, and such an impossibly long, intense finish, it would be all too easy to declare this 55-year-young Champagne to be the star of the tasting, but I thought the 1964 had the edge on the night. It is hard to argue, however, one way or the other. Perhaps it would be fairer to declare them both binary stars of the night.

**Clos des Goisses 1951** (En Magnum)

*Disgorged November 27, 2007*  
*Dosage 4.5g/l*

I think everyone except me was amazed by this wine. Bright gold in color, with some fresh, mid-palate fruit, and a discernible *pétillance* rather than a mousse as such, this magnum was definitely tiring. Others were dumbfounded to find any fruit or gas in the wine, but I was somewhat disappointed, though not surprised, to find that most of both had disappeared since I tasted the 1951 in 1993. Now that might be a long time ago, but it was 42 years old back then, and it had actually improved (and improved considerably) since I first tasted it in 1983. I just wish that I could take interested tasters back in time to see this wine as it was in 1993, but the mere fact that a “lousy” vintage has survived for 56 years still demonstrates the truly unique attributes of Clos des Goisses’s terroir.