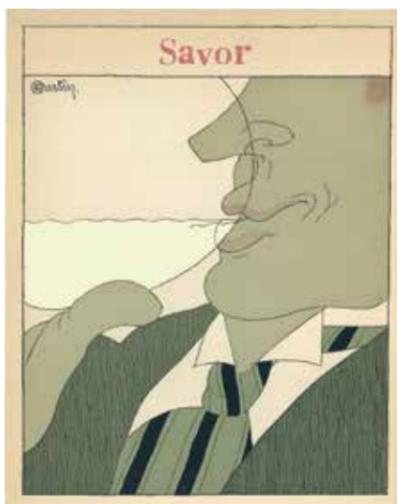


WINES THAT ARE MOSTLY APPROACHABLE WITH ENJOYMENT NOW

## 2004 CHAMPAGNE A VINTAGE ON STEROIDS

This was the largest Champagne crop on record—if it had been a Vin de Table rather than the world's greatest sparkling wine, it would all have been distilled. But as Tom Stevenson explains, it was evident from the moment the wines started fermenting that 2004 had miraculously yielded a classic Champagne vintage, even if it took a little while to discover quite how such a curious feat had happened. Additional commentary and notes by Essi Avellan MW and Simon Field MW

It was clear from the flower set that the 2004 crop would be enormous. Following the tiny harvest of 2003, the potential size of 2004 was a relief, but as the sheer enormity of 2004's crop size started to sink in, quality-conscious producers began serious efforts to reduce yields, first by debudding up to 40 percent of the potential in June and then by green-pruning as much again in July. But there were many who were less conscientious and even more who did not bother to curb their crops at all. The summer began well, and by the start of August the vines were growing nicely, steadily, and very healthily, except for a very small occurrence of oidium in a few Chardonnay vineyards. August itself was so dull, wet, and cold, though, that growth came to a halt, and with the potential size of the harvest so



vast, despite the best efforts of the best growers to reduce yields, there were widespread fears of the crop not ripening. In 2003, the harvest began on August 21, but by August 23, 2004, the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir had not even nudged their way to a potential of less than 4% ABV. Even those who had carried out the most severe debudding and green-pruning in Champagne's history started to worry. Had September been wet, it would have been an even greater disaster than 2001—a diabolical year exacerbated by the record level of overcropping (albeit nowhere near 2004's record level). But luckily September was sunny, with lovely

cool, clear nights to provide the extreme diurnal difference that preserves Champagne's intrinsically high acidity. Despite the size of the harvest, the grapes not only ripened,

they ripened at twice the normal weekly rate (by 1.5% ABV rather than 0.8% ABV) and, contrary to all previous experience, continued to grow as they ripened.

This unique phenomenon caused disbelief at the time. Everyone accepted what had happened, of course, but few had any idea how it could have happened, and it took a couple of months for the simple yet mind-boggling explanation to emerge: reserves of 2003 plant sugars in the roots of the vines. The halving of the previous year's crop from freezing April fog had left vast reserves of unused plant sugars in the vines' root systems with nothing to do. It is astonishing to think that before the first act of photosynthesis had turned molecules of carbon dioxide and water into a carbohydrate and oxygen, there was enough

would have kicked in one month earlier, and in a sunny August with its typically warmer nights, there would have been no extreme diurnal difference to preserve acidity levels. Thus, if not for that awful August, when everyone was so worried about whether the crop would ever ripen, a sunny August would have seen acid levels plummet every bit as fast as the sugar levels rose. (And if the rate of ripening was double in September, what might it have been in August?) Furthermore, with such a gigantic crop, it would have been impossible to harvest everything quickly enough, so that even the early-picked wines would have been fat and blowsy. With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, everyone in Champagne should have been grateful for such a lousy August!

Looking back, it is obvious that the 2004 vintage was saved not only by September sunshine but also by the cold and wet August. With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, everyone in Champagne should have been grateful for such a lousy August!

plant sugar locked underground to ripen most 20th-century harvests without any help from the 2004 vegetative cycle. Little wonder, then, that these plant sugars managed to inject the vine's metabolism with such super-strength in 2004. This phenomenon has become known as "the 2003 effect," and it is the reason why many Champenois talk about the 2004 harvest being made in 2003. The region's vines were like weight-lifters on steroids in 2004: Nothing could stop them from carrying the harvest to full ripeness, however heavy the burden of the crop—and it was certainly heavy that year. It was the heaviest crop there has ever been, averaging 23,000kg per hectare. This equates to 146.5 hectoliters per hectare, which is more than 1.5 times the maximum allowed for Vin de Table (now called Vin de France).

Looking back, it is obvious that the 2004 vintage was saved not only by September sunshine but also by the cold and wet August. Had the grapes not stopped ripening at around 4% ABV, the steroidal effect of 2003's plant sugars

Champagne should have a large-crop strategy but must never allow itself to get into a situation where it will produce a harvest as excessively large as 2001, let alone 2004. Champagne got away with it in 2004, but only thanks to a sunny September, a month that is wet seven times in ten, and the unused plant sugars from the year before, a phenomenon that might happen four times a century. How often can Champagne count on both a sunny September and enough plant sugars under the ground to ripen a harvest the size of 2004? Possibly never again. Champagne is often criticized for its excessively large crops, and rightly so when talking about levels such as 2004, 2001, 1983, or 1982, even though the first and last of these vintages were exceptionally successful. Although such excesses are to be condemned, Champagne really does need a large-crop strategy for two reasons: first, for built-in redundancy against the devastating effect of spring frost, which can decimate the potential crop, and because wine yields are relative—red wines require smaller yields than white

### The 2004 Champagne harvest

	Potential alcohol <sup>1</sup>	Total acidity <sup>2</sup>	Tartaric acid <sup>3</sup>	Malic acid <sup>3</sup>	pH
Chardonnay Marne	9.80%	7.2/11.0	8.1	6.1	3.08
Chardonnay Aisne	9.80%	7.1/10.9	7.7	5.8	3.11
Chardonnay Aube	10.20%	7.2/11.0	7.5	6.2	3.09
Meunier Marne	9.80%	7.4/11.3	7.9	6.4	3.09
Meunier Aisne	10.50%	7.1/10.9	7.0	5.7	3.12
Pinot Noir Marne	9.80%	6.9/10.6	7.9	5.6	3.10
Pinot Noir Aube	9.20%	7.6/11.6	7.5	6.4	3.03

Notes: 1. Expressed as alcohol by volume; 2. Expressed in grams per liter as sulfuric/tartaric; 3. Expressed in grams per liter.

wines, and white wines require smaller yields than sparkling wines. Some great Champagnes have been produced in small vintages, such as 1985, 1981, or 1971, but not all the wines were as fabulous as the surviving stellar examples of those vintages might have us believe. Small yields bring more disadvantages than advantages for sparkling-wine makers.

### The 2004 vins clairs

The *vins clairs* were classic, with the best acids I had tasted in years, thanks in no small part to the diurnal difference in the vital September period when the ripening process was hurtling along at twice the norm. Although this super-abundant vintage was ripened on steroids, it was immediately apparent that the wines were not pumped up in any sense. Indeed, the *vins clairs* were classic, with a refreshingly lean structure, firm acids, and a great linear purity. The highest yields were on the Côte des Blancs, where I regularly came across stated yields of 25,000–30,000kg/ha, and I often wondered what on earth the real figure must have been. One grower even proudly claimed to have produced 44,000kg/ha of “high-quality” Champagne. I did not taste his *vins clairs*, but *vins clairs* from the highest yield I did taste (almost 35,000kg/ha) were perfectly respectable. A long way short of being anything special, it could however easily be lost in a blend that might turn out special, such is the art of the master blender. Across the board, though, the quality was much better than it had any right to be, because the CIVC unofficially sent out word to harvest all the grapes, but to press out even less than just the *cuvée*. The fact that 2004 was produced from the *coeur de cuvée* is another reason why a potential disaster ended up as a classic vintage year.

With an exceptionally high panel average of 16.5, we were evidently impressed by 2004s as a whole; the 2004 vintage obviously has more than its fair share of truly great Champagnes. Reminiscent of how the 1979s were in the late 1980s, the 2004s promise to be long, slow developers

I think it is fair to say that everyone who regularly tastes *vins clairs* instantly recognized the quality of 2004. It was obviously a good vintage, and as soon as the 2005 harvest was in, it was equally obvious that 2004 was significantly superior (although some Chardonnay *vins clairs* in 2005 were also excellent). Because Champagne's 2005 vintage is the opposite of how that year turned out to be almost everywhere else in Europe, it has been difficult to get across the deficiencies of that to those who know other wine regions well. We will discuss 2005 in more detail

when we taste 2005 Champagnes for a future issue of *WFW*, but for the purpose of comparing it to 2004, suffice to say that its wines were tainted with a new and particularly virulent strain of rot. The worst cases were noticeable at the *vin clair* stage, but it was fairly mute in some wines and not at all evident in others, only for the taste of rot to show up years later in bottles that were once pristine. This is why 2004 has always been regarded as superior to 2005. But I think that while 2004 is definitely a good vintage, it was viewed as classic not as in “a classic great vintage” but classic as in structure and acidity following the harvests of 1999 to 2003. Certainly 1999 and 2000 were low-acid, high-pH years; 2001 was a disaster; and 2003 had the lowest acidity and highest pH on record. Even 2002 was relatively low in acidity due to a shriveling of the grapes just before harvest. I always thought of 2004 as more classic than 2002, but I honestly did not think that it came close to 2002 in terms of pure quality, and that is probably still the general view both inside and outside Champagne. After this tasting, however, I'm not so sure. It could even be better.

### The tasting

With an exceptionally high panel average of 16.5, we were evidently impressed by 2004s as a whole, and with 15 wines attracting scores of between 18.5 and 19.5 from one or more tasters, the 2004 vintage obviously has more than its fair share of truly great Champagnes. As both Essi and Simon point out, this vintage is a refreshing change from what went before—a return to normality. I agree with Simon's summary that “the wines tasted were generally impressive, firm of purpose and structure.” Reminiscent of how the 1979s were in the late 1980s, the 2004s promise to be long, slow developers.

I was bowled over by the Deutz, which is certainly one of the greatest Champagnes of the vintage and, compared to the prestige *cuvées*, must be one of the best bargains of the century. The Gosset is the finest Champagne I have tasted from this house in a decade. The bundle of Roederers (Vintage, Cristal, and Cristal Rosé) are astonishing, though it did not astonish me to see how well they performed. Neither did Alfred Gratien surprise me: The only reason it has always been one of Champagne's dark horses is that this boutique, barrel-fermented producer never

pushes itself forward. That Piper-Heidsieck was also one of my equal-second Champagnes in this tasting should not shock those who have followed its progress under *chef de cave* Régis Camus. He has taken the style closer to that of Charles Heidsieck itself, which is why I don't mind reading

was the 16 points I gave Dom Pérignon. I know that it is a good three years of post-disgorgement aging away from the point where its true finesse will begin to shine, but it is not lacking time on cork, and I really should have noticed sufficient potential to score 17 or 17.5. (It has the capacity to

Régis Camus has taken the Piper-Heidsieck style closer to that of Charles Heidsieck itself, which is why I don't mind reading “beautifully understated oak” in my note for a Champagne that has seen no oak. I once spent an entire day tasting with the late Daniel Thibault, trying to discover where the vanilla in his stainless-steel-fermented Champagne comes from!

“beautifully understated oak” in my note for a Champagne that has seen no oak whatsoever. I once spent an entire day tasting with the late Daniel Thibault, trying to discover where the vanilla in his pure stainless-steel-fermented Champagne comes from—and it is still a mystery!

I agree with both Essi and Simon about how impressively the magnum from Pierre Gimonnet showed. Gimonnet is consistently one of the very best grower Champagnes, but like Simon I also enjoyed Larmandier-Bernier, whose Brut Nature Terres de Vertus is the best-balanced non-*dosage* Champagne I have tasted in quite some time. Two other grower Champagnes that deserve equal praise are Gaston Chiquet (Special Club) and Veuve Fourny (Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame), albeit with a small caveat on the second producer. Veuve Fourny can make lovely Champagnes, but I have noticed an inconsistency over the years; even the other Veuve Fourny in this tasting was unimpressive, and we had to open second bottles of both.

The first thing that we all do after a blind tasting is to check the crib sheet against our scores, looking for anything inexplicable. Well, I was quite happy with my very low score for the 2004 Clos des Goisses. I had the same reaction to this vintage at Philipponnat the month before (among many, many Champagnes that ranged from exciting to mind-blowing) and decided that it is just a matter of time on cork after disgorgement: Clos des Goisses always needs a few years, that's all. The only score I gave that worried me

score 18.5–19 when it is closer to its peak.) It is at times like this that I wish we could discuss wines before arriving at our final score. I would have liked Essi to bring this wine to my attention under blind conditions, just as much as I would have liked to have brought the Deutz and Gosset to Essi's attention. There would be no onus on anyone to change their scores, just to take a fresh objective look at a wine earmarked by someone whose palate you respect. I think I might well have increased my score for the Dom Pérignon, and I hope that Essi might have increased hers for the Deutz and Gosset, but those are only ifs and maybes, and it is not the way that we blind taste at *WFW*.

Finally, this Champagne tasting rates as one of the lowest ever for TCA in my experience. Only one wine was corked (Joseph Perrier Rosé Brut), but with no second bottle it could not be given another chance and had to be disqualified.

### Tom Stevenson's top wines

Deutz Brut 19.5  
Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 19  
Duval Leroy Blanc de Blancs Brut 18.5  
Alfred Gratien Brut Millésime 18.5  
Larmandier-Bernier 1er Cru Non-Dosé Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Terres de Vertus 18.5  
Piper-Heidsieck Brut 18.5  
Louis Roederer Vintage Brut 18.5  
Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 18.5  
Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut 18.5  
Gaston Chiquet Special Club Brut 18  
Veuve Clicquot Vintage Rosé Brut 18  
Veuve A Devaux Millésime Brut 18  
Veuve Fourny & Fils Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame Premier Cru Monopole Extra Brut 18  
Pierre Gimonnet & Fils Vieilles Vignes de Chardonnay Brut 18  
Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Brut 18  
Perrier-Jouët Belle Époque Brut 18  
Beaumont des Crayères Fleur de Rosé Brut 17.5  
Veuve Clicquot Vintage Brut 17.5  
Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 17.5

### Average and range of scores

	Average	Range
Essi Avellan MW	16.5	13–19
Simon Field MW	16	13.5–17.5
Tom Stevenson	17	10–19.5
All wines	16.5	10–19.5

**Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut (12% ABV) - 18**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Highly elegant, toast-complexed, promising nose. Crisp, lively, elegant, light, intense. Delicious epitome of elegance. Finely crafted with the purest fruit and perfect balance of autolytic characters and fruit. **19**

**SF:** Light onion-skin color, then subtle redcurrant flavors; nice weight and balance, with firm balancing acidity to ensure longevity and potential to develop. Often the lighter colors give wines with the most profound taste and lasting impressions... **17**

**TS:** Lovely pale-peach color, with pretty Chardonnay-underlaid Pinot fruit on the palate. Silky mousse, long finish. **18.5**

**Alfred Gratien Brut Millésime (12.5% ABV) - 18**

**EA:** Deep, bright lemon-gold. Full, soft, beautiful toast-complexed nose. Buttery-creamy with plenty of fruit. Noticeable but carefully crafted use of oak without any oxidation. Highly full-bodied, rich and impressive. Velvet-smooth and concentrated. Beautiful succulent acidity and very long length. Excellent in a blockbuster style. **18.5**

**SF:** A generous nose combines spicy oak with orchard fruit, harmonious from the outset. The palate marries ripe-fruit natural sweetness with soft oaky support and will appeal immediately to those who wish for a whisper, but absolutely no more, of oak in their Vintage Champagne. This is a very sound philosophy to my mind. **17**

**TS:** Intensely flavored, Pinot-dominated, extraordinarily fruity in a yeast-complexed, kindly sulfidic mode—i.e., reductive rather than oxidative. Will be a great Champagne, but you do need to keep this a year or two before its true potential starts. **18.5**

**Louis Roederer Vintage Brut (12% ABV) - 18**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Impressively toasty and rich fragrant but refined nose. Full, succulent palate with smooth texture and fine fluffy mousse. Big and bold but not without elegance of complexity. Long and concentrated. **19**

**SF:** Softly tropical aromas, with hints of hazelnut and grilled almond—so far, so good. The palate does not disappoint, its citric core finely balanced by riper, more indulgent notes. An impressive interplay between balletic levity and structural weight. **16.5**

**TS:** Fine, floral autolytic aromas with bags of creamy-rich fruit that will go both toasty and biscuity. Rich, ripe, impressive. **18.5**

**Pierre Gimonet & Fils Vieilles Vignes de Chardonnay Brut (Magnum) - 18**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Beautifully sweet, floral-fragrant, toasty nose, with

gunpowder complexity. Tight, linear, compact, highly energetic palate. Long, racy, and zesty with lemony acidity. Not yet peaking. Delicious and full of life. **19**

**SF:** Quince and hints of pink grapefruit and late-season apples; the mouth is full-bodied, from the muscular end of the Chardonnay spectrum, with white chocolate and hints of damask and pepper; still reticent but ready to open up with a little patience. **17**

**TS:** Strong autolysis on the nose, with a fine intensity of fruit on the palate. Great with food now but will get better with age. This was a magnum; a bottle would score half a point less. **18**

**Piper-Heidsieck Brut (12% ABV) - 18**

**EA:** Deep golden. Full, rich, seductively toasty-coffee, sweet fruity nose. Voluptuous, sweet, lingering palate, with a high but spot-on dosage. Concentrated, evolved, and drinking perfectly. **19**

**SF:** Generous color, gold-plated, then an indulgent autolytic nose, very much *le goût anglais*, with digestive biscuit, honey, praline, and a hint of mocha. Perfectly *à point* now—rich, unabashedly oaky, and very long. **16.5**

**TS:** First bottle: wild garlic! Second bottle not there. Garlic is a mercaptan problem, but I have never found the softer, more gentle wild garlic before. On comparison, initially I thought this phenomenon (not problem) had more to do with oak than mercaptans and that it is a microoxygenation difference between the porosity of one cork and the other, with the increased microoxygenation highlighting this oak-derived aroma. But the lovely, silky mousse, particularly in the second bottle, points to a very slight mercaptan issue highlighted by microoxygenation differences. Anyway, both bottles are delicious, with a beautifully understated use of oak. **18.5**

**Louis Roederer Cristal Brut (12% ABV) - 18**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Soft, full, earthy mineral toast-and-red-fruit nose, with depth. Crisp and clean, energetic, so lively and pure. Long, compact, and zesty. **18.5**

**SF:** Initially rather reticent, the nose cedes notes of vanillin and soft red fruit. The palate is quite restrained, with the ripeness of fruit latent and poised, panther-like, beneath the complexity of an evolutionary inevitability. **16.5**

**TS:** Lovely soft, cushiony mousse

supporting fine, crisp fruit that is still in its entirely fruit stage. This Champagne promises a long and productive life. **18.5**

**Deutz Brut (12% ABV) - 17.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Pure, floral, delicately creamy, leesy nose. Lively, lemony palate with good weight and freshness. Balanced dosage but still holding back. Pleasurable, vivacious, and carefully crafted, with potential. Very elegant. **17.5**

**SF:** Very energetic mousse and attractive spicy nose. The oak is more dominant on the palate, veiling the harmonies with a white-pepper scherzo and a lack of clear definition. This may well change. **16**

**TS:** Absolutely beautifully balanced, wonderfully complete 2004 with a stunning, silky mousse. Where gorgeous meets complex and neither dominates. **19.5**

**Deutz Brut Rosé (12% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Deep cherry-red, orange-hued color. Stylish coffee-dominant caramel-and-cherry nose, with gentle spiciness. Winey rich palate without heaviness. Fine complexity opening up; stylish mousse and lively palate. Still young but drinking well already. **18.5**

**SF:** The color is in the middle of the putative rose spectrum, the aromas suitably embracing, and the palate full and resonant. Phenolic impulses clearly mark this as a food wine, but the elegance that pervades the ensemble is immediately attractive. **16**

**TS:** Maybe I am being unfair because this is the first rosé after the white 2004s, but it seems relatively simplistic. On retasting a little later, this was really quite classic, with some fruitiness and an elegant finish, which increased my score. **17**

**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Brut (12.5% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Fresh, youthful, white-flower nose, with lovely gunpowdery depth. Delicate, subdued, elegant aromas. Fine palate, on the reductive side. Still youthful and energetic, slightly tight. Fine, crisp acidity, purity and precision. A wine to hold on to still. **18.5**

**SF:** Attractive nose marries chalky notes

with those of citric fruit; the palate is broad and finely sculptured, long and disciplined, a little foursquare sometimes. **15**

**TS:** Well balanced, quietly complete, with no variety dominating. Classic, lean structure—but lean, not mean. Nicely slow evolution of yeast-complexed fruit. **18**

**Boizel Grand Vintage Brut (12% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold. Stylishly restrained, fresh, floral nose, with creamy complexity. Zesty, fresh, vivacious, well-balanced palate. Mouthwatering, with good length and linearity. Really 2004 in character. **17.5**

**SF:** Delicate filigree bead and an attractive nose of baked apple, sourdough, and plum. *En bouche*, the wine is very complete, teasingly oxidative on the attack, but then with grip and authoritative structure to ensure that all tensions are resolved—with aplomb. **17**

**TS:** Typically young and unready 2004. Needs time. Scored for drinking now. **16.5**

**Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut (12% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Medium-deep bright lemony color. Beautifully integrated toast, caramel, and white-fruit nose. Crisp, pure, bright-fruity, linear body, energetic fine mousse, and long, balanced length. Very classy. **18.5**

**SF:** Precocious nose of green apple and tobacco, coy in youth. The palate is less reticent, with Mirabelle plum and hints of brioche and a fine, gently phenolic finish. Plenty of potential here. **15.5**

**TS:** Fresh, crystallized fruit, with biscuity notes beginning to build. Needs another 12 months at least to soften the mousse, which has small bubbles but needs to be silkier. **17**

**Gaston Chiquet Special Club Brut (12% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold. Interesting, subdued nose with depth. Wide and rich, muscular palate. A gastronomic, winey style. The bubbles are not in a big role on the rich palate. Medium length but not much complexity. **16.5**

**SF:** Hints of nougat and maybe almond garland the attractive citric nose. The palate is quite foursquare, firm, and hitherto lacking dramatic tension and minor-key definition, which may or may not be forthcoming as the wine relaxes and

**ESSI AVELLAN'S VERDICT**

The 2004 Champagnes have been delightful ever since they started to come on to the market, but now that we are witnessing the launch of the very greatest names, we can appreciate properly the true quality potential of the vintage. Based on this tasting, I would identify energy, finesse, and purity of fruit as the common denominators of the vintage. With its joie de vivre, freshness, and tension, this vintage is strikingly opposite to its neighboring 2003 and 2005. The massive yields caused fear of dilution, but this has since proven not to be a problem. The wines might be lighter in weight, but most have a fine intensity.

What struck me in this tasting was the high quality of the straight Vintage Champagnes, many reaching

the same heights as the same producers' prestige cuvées—Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage and Dom Pérignon, for example. I rated the Louis Roederer Vintage half a point higher than the Cristal, and the Cristal Rosé only half a point higher than the Roederer Vintage Rosé. The prestige cuvées surely have further unrealized potential, but even so, the straight Vintages are great buys and are starting to drink very well.

In addition to Louis Roederer and Moët & Chandon/Dom Pérignon, the Deutz Vintages performed particularly well, which makes me look forward to the launch of their prestige cuvées. Of the grower Champagnes, one really stood out: Pierre Gimonet's stunning blanc de blancs in magnum.

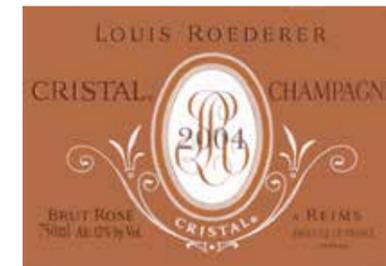
**Top wines**

Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut 19  
Louis Roederer Vintage Brut 19  
Pierre Gimonet & Fils Vieilles Vignes de Chardonnay Brut 19  
Piper-Heidsieck Brut 19  
Alfred Gratien Brut Millésime 18.5  
Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut 18.5

Deutz Brut Rosé 18.5  
Dom Pérignon Vintage Brut 18.5  
Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 18.5  
Louis Roederer Rosé Brut 18.5  
Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Brut 18.5  
Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Rosé Brut 18

gets into its stride. Indeed, on a second tasting, only minutes later, the blend seems more harmonious and complete. **16**

**TS:** Lovely balance of crisp, yeast-complexed fruit and lean acidity, lifted by the mousse. Another 2004 that is drinking well but will be so much better with more post-disgorgement aging. **18**

**Louis Roederer Rosé Brut (12% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Pale peachy color. Elegant, developing toast and autolysis-dominant nose with peachy white-fruit character. Crisp, zesty, vivacious. A fine 2004 full of life and highly elegant. Delightful. **18.5**

**SF:** Softer onion-skin color, with a poised herbal aroma; then a palate that is deceptively powerful, dried-fruit and measured tannins providing support to the ensemble, which has great potential for gastronomic accompaniment. **15.5**

**TS:** Lovely pale peach color, but it's the fine acids that lift this rosé, which is very fruity but not too fruity. Clean, fresh, crisp finish. **16.5**

**Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut (12.5% ABV) - 17**

**EA:** Deep lemon color. Refined, delicately nuanced nose, with a toasty undertone. Fluffy, big mousse and loose structure. Mouth-filling and opulent but lacking firmness of structure. **16**

**SF:** Generous mousse and attractive English-orchard nose—an orchard of heterogenous persuasion, with plums and nectarine evidenced and perhaps a couple of fig trees. The palate is equally complex, still quite taut and closed, but with a great deal of potential. **16.5**

**TS:** Truly excellent, with some finesse, but outweighed by character and complexity. Keep it a couple of years in a perfect cellar, and this could well be a beauty. **18**

**Dom Pérignon Vintage Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon color. Seductively toasty nose, with sweet pâtisserie. Elegantly perfumy/toasty. Lively, racy, crisp palate with balanced dosage and great fruit purity. On the reductive side but beautifully so. Elegant, still young, with potential. **18.5**

**SF:** Resinous, citric nose; hints of vanillin and orchard fruit in the background. The palate is gently honeyed, firmly acidic, and quite persuasive all the way through to the finish. **15.5**

**TS:** Toasty, but somewhat light in the flavor department. Well balanced. **16**



**Duval Leroy Blanc de Blancs Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold. Overt, soft, appley nose, with some deliberate oxidation and a light, spicy character. Mouth-filling, smooth-textured, but with a slightly hollow mid-palate. Long and fruity but without complexity or finesse. **14**

**SF:** Approachable style, with a nose of brioche, nougat, and hazelnut. The palate is deceptively powerful, its immediate appeal of nectarine and soft spicy fruit underwritten with no shortage of success by a taut and finely buttressed frame, which will ensure a most satisfactory development in the medium term. **17.5**

**TS:** Classic biscuity aromas, with an equally classic, crisp, lean structure. Perfectly balanced. Plenty of capacity for development in a good cellar over the next three years or so. **18.5**

**Gosset Grand Millésime Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemony. Overt, red-fruit nose with apple pie and gentle spiciness. Wide and winey. Long, succulent finish but rather one-dimensional. **15.5**

**SF:** An attractive nose of apple charlotte and pear confit, with a gentle oak undercurrent, leading to a palate where the wood holds greater sway. The spicy dried-fruit notes are now in the ascendant, but the underlying weight of fruit will out eventually—hopefully. **15.5**

**TS:** Absolutely delicious intensity of yeast-complexed fruit. So long. Rich, classic, and very classy. **19**

**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Rosé Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep, bright, glossy cherry color. Rich, charming, coffeed, red-fruit nose, with nuances. Fine, gunpowdery complexity, aromas verging on reductive at this stage. Wide but energetic, a beautifully crafted wine of excellent purity and precision. Slightly foamy mousse but otherwise lovely. To keep still. **18**

**SF:** Russet color and gentle oxidative hints; the palate is poised with red fruit and soft herbs nicely entwined; firm on the finish and therefore food-friendly, but with no shortage of elegance. **16**

**TS:** Almost too rich and too fruity. More weighty, needs finesse. **16**

**Bollinger La Grande Année Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep golden. Red-fruit-dominant nose with pastry nuances. Full, with fluffy explosive mousse and loose structure. Big and bold, but not complex or refined. **16**

**SF:** Fuller than most in color, then a nose of apple blossom and hints of elderflower. The palate has concentration, as well as fine supporting acidity and a long, authoritative finish. *Sui generis*, for those in the oaky camp. **17**

**TS:** An intensely flavored Champagne that is slightly oxidative, which detracts from its finesse. **16.5**

**Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Rosé Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep, bright, glossy, deep cherry color. Highly toasty, developed Pinot cherry nose. Velvet-smooth, voluptuous palate, a real crowd-pleaser, with a sweet but balanced *dosage*. Easy to drink and far from boring, but slightly obvious. **17.5**

**SF:** Deep russet color and an uncompromising old-fashioned nose; the palate is quite rustic, but not without a certain appeal for the cognoscenti. We have requested a second bottle, and this underlines the power of the wine; rich and classically influenced. **15**

**TS:** Soft, easy, with some Pinot Noir fruit putting its head over the parapet. Elegant. Both bottles the same. **17**

**Bollinger La Grande Année Rosé Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Full, rich, oaky, red-berry nose. Voluptuous palate, winey but with enough freshness. Good for this style, but the oak is overdone. **15.5**

**SF:** Onion-skin color and aromatics of forest floor, soft red fruit, and gentle herbs; the palate is surprisingly powerful, etched with bright acidity and elegant summer fruits. **16.5**

**TS:** Oak intruding on heaps of pretty and very elegant Pinot fruit. **17**

**Joseph Perrier Cuvée Josephine Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Youthful, floral, white-flower nose. Sharp, dry palate. Solid but nothing special. **15**

**SF:** Baked apple and sourdough inform the very traditional blended Champagne aromas; the palate has autolytic complexity and significant concentration; linear acidity completes the symphonic structure, which will need some time before it hits the home key. **17**

**TS:** Lovely mousse, so soft and silky, with fine fruit and acidity. Nice length. Enjoyable now but really needs a couple of years additional aging. **17**



**Philipponnat Cuvée 1522 Brut Grand Cru (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Pronounced nose dominated by floral and cardamom characters. Medium-weight, wide palate, with semi-refined mousse and medium length. Strong and well made but missing on elegance and complexity. **16.5**

**SF:** Spicy, gently peppery nose, then an attractive, subtle palate that will repay early drinking, such is the delicate and apéritif-friendly nature of its personality. **16**

**TS:** The fruit is more yeast-complexed than actually fruit, which makes it a bit austere. Would prefer to taste this blind with food before making a final judgment, since I feel it would have more to give. **16.5**

**Veuve Clicquot Vintage Rosé Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep cherry-pink color. Strong red-berry-and-vanilla nose, with gunpowder notes. Wide, fleshy palate and fine acidity. Straightforward, fruity, but clean and intense. **16.5**

**SF:** A fruity, slightly caramelized color is echoed on the palate, which is slightly indulgent and, to some tastes, rather overindulgent, with oak in the ascendant. Definitely for those who like wines from the richer, more expressive end of the spectrum. **14.5**

**TS:** Perfumed Pinot fruit with vanilla mid-palate and *sauce anglaise* on finish. Delightful, ready-drinking rosé. **18**



**Veuve A Devaux Millésime Brut (12% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Soft, fruit-forward, appley nose, with a little pastry. Sharp and austere on the palate. Not a charmer. **15**

**SF:** An orchard-fruit nose, with hints of tobacco and baking spice, then a surprisingly forward palate, with bright acidity and a finely chiseled stone-fruit mid-palate. Long and resonant—a beacon to the personality of the vintage. **16**

**TS:** Fine, floral finesse, with typically lean fruit outlined by crisp acidity. This has excellent, possibly great aspirations and might achieve them with a few years' cellaring. **18**

**Vilmart & Cie Grand Cellier d'Or Premier Cru Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold color. Rich, pronounced nose, with accentuated oaky notes alongside light oxidation and ripe appley character and Sherry-like yeasty notes. Intensely fruity, well-structured palate, with fine acidic backbone. A good example in this style. **16.5**

**SF:** Oakly barley-sugar nose, then a palate that combines piercing acidity (no malolactic here) with authoritative notes of red fruit and semi-tropical fruit. Austerity and oaky indulgence at the same time—a pleasing paradox in its own right. **15.5**

**TS:** An oaky style, with lovely ripe, peachy fruit underneath, which makes it currently Chardonnay-dominated. Not my style of Champagne, but it is a legitimate style. And for those who like oak in their Champagne, this is one that can be recommended—hence it is half a point higher than I would personally score. **17**

**Gaston Chiquet Réserve Blanc de Blancs d'Ay Grand Cru Brut (Magnum) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon color. Clean, crisp, lemon-meringue nose, with a pretty, toasty undertone. Refined, classy nose. Less interesting on the palate, which stays one-dimensional and sharp. Very dry and zesty. **16**

**SF:** Verbena and nectarine behind a rather clumsy mousse; the palate is interesting, with pink grapefruit, a teasing malic subplot, and a twist of white pepper to add complexity and enigma. I am not sure quite how this will develop, but it does not lack for interest. **16**

**TS:** Well-rounded Chardonnay fruit but still has a certain raciness and the freshness of the 2004 vintage. Some might think

this will age, but I would err on the side of caution and suggest drinking within just 12-24 months, which should just soften the mousse but retain all the freshness. **16.5**

**Laurent-Perrier Alexandra Grande Cuvée Rosé (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy color. Elegant, lightly berried wine on the reductive side with some toasty-gunpowdery notes. Lightweight, vivacious palate. A sophisticated style of rosé with good purity and some complexity. Pulled-back but elevated sulfur. **16.5**

**SF:** Attractive, peachy, nectarine nose, with an attractive red-fruit palate, which is finely poised, gently phenolic at the back, but ultimately elegant and harmonious. **16**

**TS:** Classic, lean rosé, with good fruitiness to finish. **16**

**Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep salmon color, with a peachy tinge. Restrained, delicate, slightly creamy-lactic nose. Crisp, non-expressive lightweight palate, with good intensity. **15.5**

**SF:** Ethereal, balletic aromas, a soft, gently herbal mousse, then an elegant and finely defined palate, just a little coarse on the finish—perhaps a function of youth. Indeed, on a second tasting, the finish is finer and therefore more in keeping with the anticipated style. **16.5**

**TS:** Raspberry fields forever... Not quite right but works okay in the glass. **16.5**

**Pol Roger Rosé Brut Extra Cuvée de Réserve (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep cherry pink color. Toast-complexed, opulent nose, with creamy notes, as well as rich red-fruit character. Zesty, wide, and creamy on the palate. Not hugely complex or refined but performs. **16**

**SF:** At the deeper end of the rosé spectrum color-wise, but surprisingly poised on the nose; mandarins and gentle summer fruits entice the taster, and balancing acidity, red fruits, and a hint of tannic support complete the tableau. **15.5**

**TS:** Fresh, elegant, very fruity red fruits, quite silky. **17**

**Veuve Fourny & Fils Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame Premier Cru Monopole Extra Brut (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon color. Unrefined, overripe, apple nose with oak notes. Simple and not perfectly clean. Sharp, austere palate with earthy oakiness. Very dry but with a soft mousse and good body weight. **14**

**SF:** Persistent bubbles and a nose of oily oak; pears and peach and a rather plump, clumsy mouth-feel. The second bottle is cleaner and with more focus behind the boudoir, so giving the benefit of the doubt, the score reflects this significant improvement. **16.5**

**SIMON FIELD'S VERDICT**

Somewhat inevitably, 2004 followed 2003 so, in one sense, marked a return to normality, if such a word maintains currency or ever had currency when describing vintages in a region this far north. More importantly and equally undeniably, chronologically it came two years after the superb 2002 vintage. The 2002s have impressed as very complete, mature, and approachable, even in relative youth, but in such a way that will not jeopardize medium- and long-term aging potential. The best of all possible worlds, in other words, and clearly a hard act to follow. Anecdotal, 2004 was a harvest that disproved the axiom equating a large crop with mediocre quality, and one that slightly favored Chardonnay.

The wines tasted were generally impressive, firm of purpose and structure. Quite a few had seen oak, more than I had anticipated, but the general style of the vintage seemed, contrary to expectation, to be of quite a serious and quite tight year, with many examples firm and even a little metallic

on the finish. I had envisaged that the Chardonnays, in particular, might be more open and perhaps floral, but there was more linearity and sometimes almost phenolic austerity evidenced. Of course, the wines are still youthful, but overall fewer than anticipated seduced with autolytic charm and many had a steely rather unforgiving core. I was anticipating that they may resemble another slightly underrated vintage, 1998, at the same age, but that was not really the case. They are certainly less rounded, in every sense, than 2008 and certainly 2002 and will merit reappraisal two or three years down the line. The putative superiority of Chardonnay was not conclusively evidenced, although excellent examples from Gimmonnet and Larmandier-Bernier illustrated its impressive potential. At the other end of the spectrum, outstanding wines from Bollinger, Gratien, and Clos des Goisses underlined the quality of some of the more muscular styles. Something for everyone, in other words... but not quite yet.

**Top wines**

Duval Leroy Blanc de Blancs Brut 17.5  
Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut 17.5  
Alfred Gratien Brut Millésime 17  
Boizel Grand Vintage Brut 17  
Bollinger La Grande Année Brut 17  
Joseph Perrier Cuvée Josephine Brut 17

Larmandier-Bernier Premier Cru Non-Dosé Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Terres de Vertus 17  
Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé Brut 17  
Pierre Gimmonnet & Fils Vieilles Vignes de Chardonnay Brut 17

**TS:** The first bottle was dominated by the aroma and flavor of terpenic oak, if there is such a thing (probably not!), and although it had plenty of fruit on the front palate, it dropped away quickly to a short finish. The second bottle was so different that I had to ask for the bottle to be checked. It was softer, fresher, more diffuse, less angular, with far more elegance in the fruit, greater length, impressive even, and a lovely fresh aftertaste. This is when you have to be brave and really mark the wine up significantly. **18**

**Agrapart & Fils Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Stylish, fragrant, lemony-floral, perfumy nose. Lovely, sweet toastiness, with vanilla. Contrastingly dry on the palate compared to the sweet nose, but pure and precise. Long, lean, zesty, and joyful. **17**

**SF:** Modest hue, then a stone-fruit nose with hints of rain-soaked pavement and orchard fruit. *En bouche*, Puritan austerity gently challenged by soft nectarine and a flinty balustrade. One feels a little short-changed, though the structure is fine. **15**

**TS:** Light, fresh, zesty fruit and an elegant mousse. **16**



**Billecart-Salmon Extra Brut (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep, peach-tinged yellow color. Mild, soft, red-fruit nose, with light toastiness and faint lactic character. Full, dry, creamy, with a foamy but soft mousse. Very dry, but the balance works. **16.5**

**SF:** Straw color and a nose of hawthorn and poached pear; the palate has impressive length, intimations of mid-palate austerity challenged by whispers of nectarine and summer fruit. **15.5**

**TS:** Good age, bags of flavor, not austere, nice mousse, lively finish—works well. **16**

**Larmandier-Bernier Premier Cru Non-Dosé Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Terres de Vertus (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon color. Earthy-mineral nose with lemon, apple, and light oxidative notes. Very dry, austere palate. Foamy, big mousse. Sugar would help to bring charm. Too dry and hard. **13**

**SF:** Impressive golden color, with a gentle and persistent bead; an attractive, honeyed nose, with notes of praline, brioche, and hints of redcurrant. Palate is fulsome and

incredibly rich for a *nature* style; most appealing. **17**

**TS:** Creamy-biscuity aroma, balanced palate, nicely developed fruit; well-aged but not old, nothing austere, the gentle mousse leading to a gently creamy-rich finish. **18**

**Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Soft, oak-and-vanilla-lined white-fruit nose. Rich and smooth, with a big mousse. Round and mouth-filling, with medium length. **16**

**SF:** A persistent bead and impressive mousse cede to aromatics of honeydew melon and *citron pressé*. The palate is quite tight and firm, with a phenolic backdrop slightly undermining the purity of the attack. **15**

**TS:** Lovely, soft, very easy-to-drink-now style of Chardonnay. I would be surprised if this ages particularly well, but it is a delight to drink now and for the next 12 months at least. **17**

**Vilmart & Cie Cœur de Cuvée Premier Cru Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold. Mild, smooth, flower-dominant nose, with creamy-leesy complexity. Zesty, energetic, rich, opulent palate. Long and winey, with well-integrated light oak influence. Succulent palate, with some complexity but little elegance. **16**

**SF:** Gentle mousse, fine citric profile with a stone-fruit backdrop. Palate has phenolic grip from the oak, its potential underscored by a linear, crisp finish. Better to assess in a coupe of years... **15**

**TS:** Rich, ripe, and oaky, and deliciously so. Oak in Champagne is not my style, but within the category, some oak fights and some does not, no matter the stylistic preferences of the taster, and here the oak does not fight. **17**

**Beaumont des Crayères Fleur de Rosé Brut (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep cherry-pink color. Pronounced, fruit-forward nose with evolutive notes but not autolytic. Ripe, fruity style. Crisp acidity, simple clean wine. **15**

**SF:** A classic color and a classic nose of redcurrant, peach, and soft strawberry. Just a hint of sulfur. The palate is, at this stage, just a little foursquare. **15**

**TS:** A bit smelly at first, but it blew away after a while, so not mercaptan. Second sample: pure fruit, lovely, has finesse. **17.5**

**Drappier Grande Sèndrée Brut (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep golden color. Rich, promisingly toasty nose, with dried-fruit depth, earthy minerality, and appley fruit. Fine depth of fruit on the palate, too, structured and

intense. Long, with good concentration, some complexity, but little elegance. **17**

**SF:** Full of color, with barley sugar and honeysuckle on the nose, this wine does not flatter to deceive. The palate is indulgent, with ripe fruit and vanillin, certainly, but with the reassuring support of balanced acidity and the sheer gravitas of the finish underscoring the ensemble. **16.5**

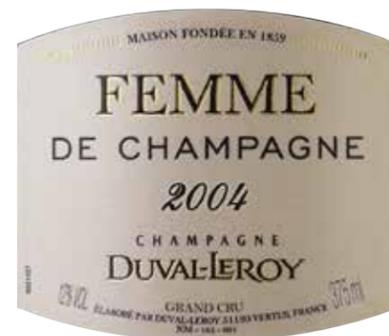
**TS:** Again, a rather runaway mousse, with bubbles that are somewhat large. Needs time, which will bring improvements, but I cannot see an overabundance of potential at this stage. **14**

**Drappier Millésime Exception (12% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold color. Full, toasty, with attractive baking-spice-and-apple character, with controlled oxidation. Full, slightly loose, winey palate, with a coarse mousse. Long and intense on the finish but lacking any added dimension. **15.5**

**SF:** A decidedly complex nose, despite the rather loose-knit mousse; figs and praline compete with *agrumes* and red apple, with a shadow of oxidation in the background. The mouth-feel is rather indulgent and a little loose-knit, however. If the wine's day has passed, it has passed a little too soon, but many will disagree... **16**

**TS:** The mousse needs time to tame, after which it should have the finesse it is currently lacking. **16**



**Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut (12% ABV) (37.5cl) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold. Soft vanilla-and-pastry nose. Unrefined and hollow palate with lactic notes. **13.5**

**SF:** Apple blossom and acacia on the nose promise well. The palate does not disappoint, with definitive wood influence creeping in, but the notes of gentle honey, underscored by brioche and stony acidity, are all very attractive and of classical, Palladian construction. **16.5**

**TS:** A tad of butterscotch on the nose, but totally absent on the palate, which really is quite tight and awaiting development. This needs two years at least, by which time there should be no butterscotch at all, and the palate will be open. **17.5**

**Lanson Gold Label Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Fresh, appley, with pastry aromatics and controlled oxidation—a character of its own. Less elegant on the palate, with big mousse and loose structure. Rich, opulent, obvious style. **15.5**

**SF:** Classic nose of green apple, verbena, and a hit of Mirabelle plum; the palate is quite phenolic, which makes the finish a little austere and perhaps points the wine toward gastronomic pairings, where the weight will come into its own. **15**

**TS:** Fine, delicate, polished yeast-complexed fruit, with a slippery-soft mousse. **17**

**Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame Brut (12.5% ABV) - 16**

**EA:** Deep lemon-gold. Nicely integrated nose with fudge, spice, yeast, and apple. Full, powerful palate, with good freshness and length. Lovely acidity and zestiness. **16**

**SF:** Soft, spicy, gently honeyed nose, then a broad, finely structured mid-palate, with plenty to give, despite undeniable generosity already offered at the time of tasting. **16**

**TS:** Nice yeast-complexed aromatics, but lacking a bit of substance on the palate. This is, however, a typically restrained Champagne vintage, so it could well develop favorably. **15.5**

**Laurent-Perrier Brut (12% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Full, soft, and mild red-apple nose and light, charred complexity. Smooth and rounded, harmonious on the palate. Not much character but balanced and pleasurable. **16**

**SF:** Classic, gently oxidative nose: acacia and summer meadows, if one seeks a more poetic prelude. On the palate, the fruit is quite hard, for me lacking the elegance for which this vintage will be recognized. **14**

**TS:** The first blend after tasting pure blanc de blancs, and it does have an identifiable completeness. Not that the best blanc de blancs were not complete, but it was a different completeness, a completeness of pure Chardonnay. Classy, creamy finish. **17**



**Palmer & Co Brut (12% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Mild, restrained, lightly nutty, apple-and-cookie nose. Winey palate with calm mousse and medium length. Fairly straightforward but clean and balanced. **15.5**

**SF:** Orchard-fruit aromas, peach and hints of redcurrant; the palate combines natural ripeness with a relatively high *dosage* to good effect, the crisp acidity providing discreet architectural support. **15**

**TS:** Clean, fresh, and complete, with a fine mousse of tiny bubbles leading to a gently crisp finish. **16.5**

**Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame Brut Rosé (12.5% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Medium-deep peachy-cherry color. Sweet, ripe, yeasty-oaky nose. Full, velvety, winey, and intense. Slightly clumsy, lacking elegance. **15.5**

**SF:** Measured aromas of redcurrant, herbs, and youthful strawberry; the palate is equally subtle and aromatic, not lacking in phenolic support and impressively strident on the finish. **15.5**

**TS:** On the nose and the front palate, this could be white Champagne, but the Pinot taste begins to invade the finish. **16**

**Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut (12% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Pale lemon-green. Soft, lemony-floral nose with sweet toasty character. Pungent palate with some sulfur. Linear and fruity, but a bit clumsy. **16**

**SF:** Imaginative nose, floral and slightly resinous, its *élevage* brought into sharper focus by a palate that is, quite understandably, somewhat closed and mute. The distinctive style will have a loyal and discerning following, although it would not be my first selection. **14**

**TS:** A bit sulfidic at the moment, but that will get toasty, though the fruit will remain somewhat angular and unyielding. **16**

**Veuve Clicquot Vintage Brut (12% ABV) - 15.5**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Overt, oxidative, bruised apple-and-vanilla nose. Loose palate of appley character and a little autolysis character. Wide and winey with big mousse. **14**

**SF:** Typical nose of praline, vanillin, and green fruit. The palate is forward, quite marked by acidity, and with a slightly bitter finish. **14.5**

**TS:** Nice yeast-complexed aromatics, with classic structure and elegant biscuity fruit, leading off to a long, fading finish. **17.5**

**Bruno Paillard Brut (12% ABV) - 15**

**EA:** Deep lemon. Smooth toffee nose with pâtisserie and soapy whiffs. Winey, loose-structured, and highly lactic palate. Lacks elegance and liveliness. **13**

**SF:** Ripe, slightly syrupy nose, with interesting hints of fennel and spice. The palate is luxuriant—for my tastes a little lacking in structural grip—but certainly concentrated and long. **15**

**TS:** Some butterscotch clearly evident on the nose, which is distracting, but not so dominant on the palate, which has an

elegant ripeness of fruit underpinned by fine acid balance. **16.5**

**Diebolt-Vallois Fleur de Passion à Cramant Brut (12.5% ABV) - 15**

**EA:** Medium-deep lemon. Soft, creamy, youthfully floral nose, with confectionary notes. Oak comes through especially on the palate as wood, with its sweet vanilla tone and lightly oxidative character. Firm and rich, with length, but oak-dominant. **15**

**SF:** A nose of gunflint and peach-kernel gives way to a very peachy ripe palate, which surprises with its gentle seduction, its *dosage* perhaps overwhelming the ensemble a little. **13.5**

**TS:** Oaked Chardonnay and very slightly oxidative on the finish. I would prefer a more reductive style for this particular wine, but there is still a juiciness to the fruit and the oxidativeness is entirely stylistic, not bordering on faulty or even just the negative. **16**

**Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut (13% ABV) - 14.5**

**EA:** Deep golden. Soft, rich, nicely integrated nuances of pastry, tropical fruit, and red apple. Full-bodied, smooth palate, with well-balanced acidity and good, dry length. Slightly coarse mousse but good energy on the palate. **16**

**SF:** Full-bodied with expressive, gently honeyed nose and notes of *agrumes* and nougat in support; the palate is broad and cathedral-like in its construction; long and rounded on the finish. **17.5**

**TS:** Fruity, but a bit of a dullard. **10**

**Veuve Fourny & Fils Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut (12% ABV) - 14.5**

**EA:** Pale lemony. First bottle slightly oxidized. Soft vanilla, cream, and tropical-fruit nose, with subdued toastiness. Medium-weight and dry, fresh palate. Sharp, lemony acidity. Good but not great. **15.5**

**SF:** Gold and green colors show off the fine bead, complemented by a nose of red apple, cow parsley, and white flowers. The palate is broad but with finely etched acidity and an appreciable linearity, which betrays Chardonnay of considerable pedigree and potential. For me, the second bottle was actually less impressive, although I suspect I am in a minority of one here, vis-à-vis my learned colleagues on the panel... **16**

**TS:** Oxidative, hollow, absolutely no fruit. Cannot believe anybody would—could—deliberately make such a wine, so I have called for a second bottle. Second bottle has an amplexness not found in the first. This is by no means a top wine. The mousse is too explosive, and the fruit, now ample, is just simple, but at least it can have a score that Andrew Jefford defines [in *WFW's* 20-point system] as “enjoyable, simple, and straightforward wine.” **12** ■