



## The Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships 2014: The Trophy Winners

Tom Stevenson presents the results of the first Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, which he created to provide consumers and trade with the definitive annual guide to the very best wines in their style

**A** weak point of most wine competitions is the absence of the very best wines. You will never see, for example, a Bordeaux first growth entered into any competition, but we had hoped that the “first growths” of Champagne would support the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships and, from the trophy winners profiled here, it is clear that most have. The iconic likes of Dom Pérignon Rosé, Dom Pérignon Oenothèque (now P2), Louis Roederer Cristal, or Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé have not entered any other competition.

### **A competition with a difference**

A couple of other sparkling-wine competitions have been attempted, but as soon as you examine the gold-medal winners, it is clear that most of even the second- and third-tier Champagnes did not enter, let alone the best of the best, and you have to wonder how many of the golds truly deserved their medals. I wanted a competition where the medal winners are so richly endowed that the opposite would happen: where no one would wonder whether a modest or unknown gold winner deserved its medal but would consider the company it is keeping and give it respect. To create a competition like that, the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships had to be special, and three features are key to that:

1. It is the only competition to be judged exclusively by Champagne and sparkling-wine specialists. I have tasted thousands of Champagnes blind with both Essi Avellan MW and Tony Jordan, and they are simply the best tasters in the business when it comes to fizz.

2. It is the only global competition in which every judge present agrees all the medals awarded. In bigger competitions, the more wines entered, the more judges are roped in, and the judging becomes a bit like pass the parcel, the degree of success depending on whose table a wine lands on. At the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, there is just one panel, and if needs be, we will go on tasting for a month to ensure that we maintain this unprecedented level of consistency in the judging process.

3. Only gold and silver medals are recognized and publicized. On average, 30 percent of wines entered into major competitions receive a bronze medal, and approximately 25 percent are “commended” or the equivalent. We believe that telling consumers most of the wines entered into a competition are winners to one degree or another diminishes the value of those awards. We therefore consign the bronze medals and commended wines to the dustbin of shame along with the No Awards that other competitions put there.

### **An embarrassment of riches**

This was such a successful approach that we were humbled by the number of truly iconic Champagnes being entered, but their presence soon became something of a problem—a gold-plated problem maybe, but a problem nonetheless. Deluxe cuvées generally command stratospherically high prices compared to the rest of Champagne and the even less expensive sparkling wines from elsewhere, but the most iconic of those deluxe cuvées are in a different price league altogether, often retailing for

£500 or more. With such great but hugely expensive Champagnes pouring in, we began to wonder whether it would be fair to pitch them against normally priced Champagnes and (in the latter stages of the competition) other sparkling wines. On the other hand, we had to consider whether it would be fair to exclude any wine from a process designed to find the very best. To resolve this conundrum, we judged the deluxe Champagne cuvées separately so that we not only discovered the best deluxe blanc de blancs, rosé and so on but also found the best regular blanc de blancs, rosé, et al. Not to put our name on the very best of 99 percent of each style of Champagne would have been a dereliction of duty. We then brought the best of these two worlds together to decide the World Champion Champagne trophy, because to deny the best deluxe cuvées their place in the ultimate Champagne taste-off would have been a mockery. Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé was the clear winner of the World Champion Champagne trophy in the first year of our competition, but after 35 years of experiencing the extraordinary heights that the greatest “regular” Champagnes can achieve, it should never be taken for granted that this title will always be won by a deluxe cuvée. We then repeated this process at the international trophy stage, removing the World Champion Deluxe Champagne trophy winners from every World Champion taste-off by style but including World Champion Champagne (whether deluxe or not) in the final showdown for Supreme World Champion, which is our version of Best in Show.



**BEST IN CLASS**

All the wines submitted were initially tasted and evaluated by origin and style. This ensured that each wine's medal potential was evaluated according to its own typicality of provenance. Within each category of origin, the wines were assessed strictly by style—that is, all the brut nature together, all the blanc de blancs, rosé, et cetera. Where no gold medals were awarded, no wine of that style from that provenance could progress any further in the competition; but where there were gold-medal winners, we grouped them together, demoted any that did not stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest, and chose the Best in Class.



**Acknowledgments**

We are extremely grateful to Plumpton College Wine Centre for providing the perfect venue for our judging. Part of the University of Brighton, Plumpton College is the only educational facility in Europe offering a BSc in viticulture and enology in the English language, and naturally enough, it specializes in sparkling wine. We are also hugely indebted to Riedel for supplying their Vinum Chianti glasses, which are ideal for tasting Champagne and other sparkling wines.

*Tasting venue:* Plumpton College Wine Centre  
*Judges:* Tom Stevenson, Essi Avellan MW, and Dr Tony Jordan  
*Associate judge:* George Markus  
*Completion steward:* Amanda Regan  
*Logistics and pouring:* Karl Franz, Sensible Wine Services  
*Tasting glasses:* Riedel 6416/15 aka Vinum Chianti

**Australian Blanc de Blancs**

Blue Pyrenees Estate 2010 Midnight Cuvée

**Australian Blend**

House of Arras NV Brut Elite C601

**Australian Non-Dosage**

Este 2007 De Bortoli Wines

**Australian Rosé**

Dominique Portet NV Brut Rosé

**Australian Sparkling Red**

Grant Burge NV Shiraz Cabernet

**Australian Vintage Rosé**

House of Arras 2005 Rosé

**Austrian Vintage Blend**

Bründlmayer 2008 Brut (magnum)

**Austrian Vintage Magnum**

Bründlmayer 2008 Brut (magnum)

**California Blend**

Roederer Estate NV Brut Sparkling Wine

**California Rosé**

Caraccioli Cellars 2006 Brut Rosé

**Cap Classique Blanc de Blancs**

Graham Beck Wines 2009 Blanc de Blancs

**Cava Traditional Varieties**

Gramona 2000 Enoteca Brut Nature

**Cava Mixed Varieties (Traditional & International)**

Freixenet NV Elyssia Gran Cuvée

**Cava Rosé**

Freixenet 2012 Cuvée de Prestige Trepas

**Champagne NV Blend**

Champagne Pommery NV Brut Royal (magnum)

**Champagne NV Blanc de Blancs**

Champagne Ruinart NV Blanc de Blancs

**Champagne NV Magnum**

Champagne Pommery NV Brut Royal (magnum)

**Champagne NV Rosé**

Champagne Charles Heidsieck NV Rosé Réserve

**Champagne Vintage Blend**

Champagne Les Pionniers 2004 Brut

**Champagne Vintage Blanc de Blancs**

Champagne De Castelnau 2002 Blanc de Blancs

**Champagne Vintage Rosé**

Champagne Charles Heidsieck 1999 Rosé Millésime

**Champagne Deluxe Blend**

Champagne Dom Pérignon 1996 Oenothèque

**Champagne Deluxe Blanc de Blancs**

Champagne Dom Ruinart 2002 Blanc de Blancs

**Champagne Deluxe Magnum**

Champagne Laurent-Perrier NV Grand Siècle (magnum)

**Champagne Deluxe Rosé**

Champagne Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé

**Chilean Blanc de Noirs**

Miguel Torres Chile NV Cordillera Brut

**English NV Blanc de Blancs**

Wiston Estate NV Blanc de Blancs

**English Vintage Blanc de Blancs**

Nyetimber 2003 Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

**English Vintage Magnum**

Nyetimber 2003 Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

**English Vintage**

Digby Fine English 2009 Réserve Brut

**English Vintage Rosé**

Hattingley Valley 2011 Rosé

**Franciacorta NV Blend**

Il Mosnel NV Brut

**Franciacorta Non Dosage**

Il Mosnel 2008 Rosé Pas Dosé Parosé

**Franciacorta Vintage Rosé**

Il Mosnel 2008 Rosé Pas Dosé Parosé

**Franciacorta Vintage Blend**

Ca' del Bosco 2005 Cuvée Annamaria Clementi (magnum)

**Franciacorta Magnum**

Ca' del Bosco 2005 Cuvée Annamaria Clementi (magnum)

**New Zealand Blend**

Akarua 2010 Vintage Brut

**Other Italian**

Tenuta Scarpa Colombi NV Roberto Colombi Blanc de Blancs Brut

**Prosecco Brut**

Bisol NV Crede (magnum)

**Prosecco Dry**

Nino Franco 2013 Valdobbiadene Primo Franco

**Prosecco Extra Dry**

Tenuta Ca' Bolani NV Prosecco

**Prosecco Magnum**

Bisol NV Crede (magnum)

**Southeastern Europe**

Aleksandrovic 2009 Trijumf Chardonnay

**Trentodoc Vintage Blanc de Blancs**

Ferrari 2007 Perlé

**Trentodoc Vintage Rosé**

Rotari 2010 Alperregis Rosé Millesimato



**SUPREME WORLD CHAMPION**

**Champagne Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé 12%, 9g**

**Other trophies |** World Champion Deluxe Rosé, World Champion Champagne

**Background |** I always think of Louis Roederer as the House of Terroirs. Its immaculate 240ha (593-acre) estate is divided into six domaines, one for each category of wine (Domaine 1: Vintage; Domaine 2: Rosé; Domaine 3: Cristal Brut; Domaine 4: Blanc de Blancs; Domaine 5: Brut Premier; and Domaine 6: Cristal Rosé). Each domaine is planted and farmed specifically according to the style of Champagne to be crafted from its harvest. The size of Domaine 6 has not changed since it was selected in 1974 by Jean-Claude Rouzaud, the current chairman and sixth-generation descendant of Nicolas Schreider (who preceded his nephew, the eponymous Louis Roederer). Rouzaud selected parcels in Aj, Avize, and Le Mesnil-sur-Oger that are all on hard chalk, in perfectly wind-sheltered locations and totally planted with massal-selection vines. Every year these parcels produce fruit of the highest phenolic ripeness in the Roederer estate, yet approximately 50 percent will be culled in the strict selection process. (Declassified blocks prior to harvest go to the reserve wines, declassified wines at *assemblage* end up in the vintage rosé, the 2008 of which won a gold medal.) It is not just the high ripeness of the grapes produced that is key here, but also the balance, which provides the fruit with its exceptional freshness and finesse. Rouzaud also changed the winemaking process, abandoning traditional maceration on the press, which has an oxidative tendency, and introducing a week-long cold soak that is still unique in Champagne (see my A la Volée column, *WFW* 37, p.50). As from 2011, Domaine 6 has been converted to 100 percent biodynamic farming. **Note |** Very pale, light-bronze color. Incredible aged complexity of aroma, super-stylish, spicy, and elegant. This is an extraordinary wine, absolutely exquisite in its balance of concentration and acidity. Sweet, rich, and velvet-smooth on the palate, yet so long, linear, and lingering. Very much alive, it is succulent and refined, with a crisp dry finish. A sheer pleasure to drink—sorry, taste! To say this has great finesse would be a huge understatement.



**WORLD CHAMPIONS**

**WORLD CHAMPIONS BY ORIGIN**

*From the Best in Class, there was a taste-off for the most outstanding wine to receive the World Champion trophy for each country or appellation.*

**WORLD CHAMPION AUSTRALIA**

**Blue Pyrenees Estate 2010 Midnight Cuvée 12.5%, 7g (100% Chardonnay)**

**Background |** This property in the Pyrenees region of Western Victoria was formerly known as Avoca and chosen in the 1960s when French winemakers from Rémy Martin, the original owners, searched for suitable site by overlaying gold-mining maps with wine maps. The idea was that they wanted to find deep gravel soil in a climate suitable for viticulture, and since most gold had been extracted from dried-up river beds, they searched for locations that coincided with established vineyards. They found only two such overlaps in all of Australia: one in Pemberton, but that was the back of beyond back then; the other in Avoca, now known as the Pyrenees. Midnight Cuvée is so called because the grapes are hand-harvested at night under lights, when the temperature has dropped and the wines are fresher and crisper. **Note |** This is a really smart, approachable blanc de blancs, with excellent acids to ensure the freshness remains for the long term. Medium-deep, beautiful, and star-bright, developing lemon color. Crisp, acidic palate, really good structure, linear, with some textural creaminess on the finish.

**WORLD CHAMPION AUSTRIA**

**Bründlmayer 2008 Brut (magnum) 12.5%, 8.7g (40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 10% Pinot Gris, 10% Pinot Blanc, 10% Grüner Veltliner)**

**Background |** Few people know that Willi Bründlmayer's wife Edwige grew up in Paris, where her favorite tittle was Champagne. When she moved to Langenlois, this was Willi's motivation to start production of his own sparkling wine, which he has made since 1989. Fermented in stainless steel, where it undergoes a full malolactic before

being aged on fine lees in Austrian oak for a few months. A 1983 late-harvested Pinot Blanc is used for dosage.

**Note |** A medium-deep lemony color, this has very stylish, still evolving, spicy-gunpowder aromas that will go distinctly toasty with time. Lovely, promising, very rich and substantial palate, intense yet fresh and full of fruit that is firm and succulent, with a long, linear finish that is good and dry.

**WORLD CHAMPION USA**

**Roederer Estate NV Brut Sparkling Wine 12%, 12g (60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir)**

**Background |** In 1987, the legendary Michel Salgues made history with the second release from this venture when it became the first sparkling wine of a standard equivalent not just to Champagne but to good-quality Champagne. Being first to scale the heights is, of course, a unique achievement, but managing to stay at the top as the competition increases in number and quality can be even harder—but Arnaud Weyrich, the current winemaker, manages that with ease. Interestingly, it is Roederer Estate's entry-level cuvée that has won the World Champion trophy, but it's secret is the restrained use of oak-aged reserve wine, which was the difference between the first and second releases all those years ago. **Note |** Beautifully pale lemon in color, with a stylish nose of delicate toasty notes floating over fresh white fruit and blossom. This is perfectly reflected on the palate, which is smooth and creamy, with lovely interwoven toasty complexity. The finish is long and the dosage well balanced.

**WORLD CHAMPION CAP CLASSIQUE**

**Graham Beck Wines 2009 Blanc de Blancs 12%, 6g (100% Chardonnay)**

**Background |** This blanc de blancs is the signature cuvée of Graham Beck's Cap Classique range and, in my opinion, the flagship of all *cap classiques* in South Africa, so I was both happy and relieved to see we had chosen this for the World Champion trophy. Quite how winemaker Pieter Ferreira produces this year on year from Robertson's flat, hot vineyards is something of a miracle. Half the wines undergo first fermentation in small oak *pièces* (the Champenois 205-liter barriques), half in stainless steel. The *pièces* are mostly all well used, with only 7 percent new added each year. **Note |** Lovely deep lemon color. A stylish, yeast-complexed, restrained, yet creamy-opulent nose, with rich and round creamy fruit on the palate. A tasty, immensely satisfying *cap classique* that glides to a good brut finish. Smart winemaking.

**WORLD CHAMPION CAVA**

**Gramona 2000 Enoteca Brut Nature 12.5%, 2.5g (75% Xarel-lo, 25% Macabeo)**

**Background |** John Radford, the late Spanish wine

authority, will be looking down from *el paraíso* laughing his head off. He would never have believed that I could devise a competition that would result in the highest Spanish sparkling-wine honors going to a Cava produced from traditional grape varieties. Although I have always rated Cavas from Gramona and have long considered Xarel-lo to be the best of Cava’s three traditional varieties, it is true that I have been generally disparaging about the potential of all three grapes. Furthermore, I have seldom enjoyed Cavas with any age on them and *brut nature* is not exactly my favorite style. However, I have heard Gene Krupa play a mean “Drum Boogie” with just two matchsticks and a matchbox, so I am prepared to accept that a silk purse can sometimes be made from a sow’s ear. What else can explain this 14-year-old *brut nature* other than the gifted hands of Jaume Gramona?

**Note |** This is indeed exceptional for a 14-year-old Cava. Its medium-deep, bright lemon color is younger and fresher looking than many Cavas half its age. It has sweet, enticingly restrained, spice-complexed fruit aromas, followed by firm, strong, vital fruit on the palate. Full of life. Long, tight, and dry, but nicely lingering fruit on the finish.

#### WORLD CHAMPION CHAMPAGNE

##### Champagne Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé

See *Supreme World Champion*

#### WORLD CHAMPION CHILE

##### Miguel Torres Chile NV Cordillera Brut

12%, 8.6g (100% Pinot Noir)

**Background |** From the Curicó Valley south of Santiago, the birth of this sparkling wine dates back to the early 1980s, when Miguel Torres was flying to Chile three or four times a year with Lan Chile airline. “In those days, just after taking off, they would serve a Chilean sparkling wine to all the passengers, and I can assure you that it was almost undrinkable—at least for anyone who was used to better European products. That is why I decided to make something better myself. Initially we used Chardonnay, but after a while we realized that Pinot Noir had a much better potential.”

**Note |** Pretty smart stuff. Bright pale-lemon color; fresh and fragrant aromas of sweet red fruit and candy, with an underlying toastiness. Crisp and bright fruit on the palate. It might not be hugely complex, but it is lingering and delightful.

#### WORLD CHAMPION ENGLAND

##### Digby Fine English 2009 Réserve Brut

12%, 8g (65% Chardonnay, 17.5% Pinot Noir, 17.5% Meunier)

**Background |** Named after Sir Kenelm Digby, a colorful 17th-century pirate and philosopher who was also involved in the elaboration of strong

glass bottles, Digby Fine English is a relatively new English sparkling-wine venture owned by Trevor Clough and Jason Humphries. This is the first English sparkling wine to achieve such a high level of critical success using the equivalent business model of what the Champenois call a *négociant-manipulant*, which sources its grapes from privately owned vineyards far and wide (in this instance, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire). Winemaker Dermot Sugrue—who started his career at Nyetimber but now runs Wiston Estate, the winner of Best in Class English NV Blanc de Blancs—produces this mini-masterpiece using stainless steel, no oak, and only partial malolactic. He also produced a limited edition of 220 magnums of the same wine, which are being pre-sold for delivery in May 2015.

**Note |** Pale lemon in color, with a delicate, very promising, yeast-complexed, orchard-fruit aromas gently supported by pretty gunpowder notes for added complexity. Light in weight, long and elegant in flavor, this has a finely tuned palate that is neat and well crafted, with a perfectly balanced *dosage* and toasty complexity on the finish. Very dry finish. A seriously complex, amazingly sleek, and very smartly made sparkling wine of the highest and most pristine order.

#### WORLD CHAMPION FRANCIACORTA

##### Il Mosnel 2008 Rosé Pas Dosé Parosé, Franciacorta DOCG

12.5%, 2.5g (70% Pinot Noir, 30 % Chardonnay)

**Background |** This stunning Franciacorta, disgorged almost one year earlier, is proof positive that non-*dosage* sparkling wines do not have to be oxidative, and it strongly suggests that sunnier regions are more suitable for this style than Champagne. Parosé is largely made from free-run Pinot Noir grapes grown in the Giardino vineyard next to the Barzanò family home, as depicted on the label. The base wine is fermented exclusively in 225-liter barriques, where the wine rests for approximately five months. Despite this oak contact and the fact that the barriques are a minimum of once used, thus fairly new, there is very little if any trace of oak in the aromatics or palate of this wine, merely the textural smoothness of micro-oxidation. This absence of any oakiness is one of Parosé’s most compelling attributes. Only 10 percent of the wine undergoes malolactic fermentation.

**Note |** Bronzed, pale-peach color. Lovely, delicate, bright Pinot fruit aromas and flavors, very smooth and clean on the palate, with a long, crisp finish that is not at all austere.

#### WORLD CHAMPION NEW ZEALAND

##### Akarua 2010 Vintage Brut

13%, 6g (49% Chardonnay, 51% Pinot Noir)

**Background |** This is only the second sparkling wine that Akarua has produced, and it is the first vintage sparkling wine. Although produced by winemaker Matt Connel, Tony Jordan consults,

so after we discovered the winner of this trophy and realized the connection, I removed Jordan’s score, but Akarua still came out the clear winner. The grapes are estate grown in Bannockburn, a subregion of Central Otago, where 2010 was a top vintage for both Pinot Noir and sparkling wine. (The next equally top vintage for both types of wine will be 2013.) Eighty percent of this wine was fermented in stainless-steel vats, the rest in French barriques (two to five years old), and although a pure vintage in construction, the base wine used for the *dosage* contained reserves of between two and four years’ age.

**Note |** A bright, medium-deep lemon color; with fresh fruity aromas mellowed by nutty highlights from the Chardonnay and pencil shavings from the Pinot Noir, plus some autolytic notes for complexity. Intense, evolved, mellow palate, with fine, long, linear fruit that is nicely taut on the palate, leading to a good brut finish, supported by a lovely fluffy mousse. More for immediate pleasure than long-term keeping.

#### WORLD CHAMPION PROSECCO

##### Nino Franco 2013 Valdobbiadene Primo Franco

10.5%, 27g (100% Glera)

**Background |** Named for the son of the founder Primo Franco, who has run the company since 1982, this Prosecco comes from selected lots of the highest-grown grapes in the family estate. It does not undergo any malolactic, and of all the cuvées in the Nino Franco range, it most closely reflects the technological advances that Primo has introduced to the firm’s winemaking regime.

**Note |** Super-bright, very pale lemon color, with fresh, peppery-spicy and floral aromas, and white fruits on the palate. Promising, good intensity and length. Attractive, vibrant, and balanced sweetness on the finish. Top Prosecco.

#### WORLD CHAMPION TARENTODOC

##### Ferrari 2007 Perlé

12.5%, 6g (100% Chardonnay)

**Background |** This was the first vintaged sparkling wine produced by Ferrari, and it quickly led to two other Perlé cuvées: Perlé Rosé and Perlé Nero (a blanc de noirs). Created in 1971 by Mauro Lunelli, who originally named the wine Ferrari Brut de Brut; he changed this in 1983 to Ferrari Perlé, which was a name that had been used by Giulio Ferrari, the founder, in the early 1900s. The Perlé name is a shortened form of the German term Perlend Wein (later Perlwein), a reminder that Trento was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire when Giulio Ferrari established this company in 1902.

**Note |** The medium-deep lemon color gives away its seven years, but it tastes and smells much younger. Overt, soft, ripe, white-fruit aromas, with hints of toasty and pastry complexity coming through. Crisp palate, smooth texture, with mellow yet fresh and perky Chardonnay fruit. Refined mousse, long length, and a finely balanced *dosage*.

#### WORLD CHAMPIONS BY STYLE

*The Best in Class winners from all over the world were grouped together within their own style to decide each of these World Champion trophies.*

#### WORLD CHAMPION NON-DOSAGE

##### Il Mosnel 2008 Rosé Pas Dosé Parosé, Franciacorta DOCG

See *World Champions by Origin*

#### WORLD CHAMPION NV BRUT BLEND

##### Champagne Pommery NV Brut Royal

(magnum) 12.5%, 8.5g (One third each of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Meunier)

**Background |** Having been blown away by the 2007-based magnum on a visit to the cellars in June 2013, I urged Thierry Gasco, the *chef de cave*, to enter the magnum version to see how my fellow judges and I would rate it under blind conditions—and we were all blown away! Pommery’s Non-Vintage magnums spend four years on yeast compared to three years for its 75cl bottles. We tasted the 2008-based blend, which contained 31 percent of reserve wines (15 percent of the 2007-based blend, plus individual grands crus going back a further four years) and was disgorged in the second quarter of 2013.

**Note |** A lovely, seamless mix of pure fruit and beautifully, toasty-perfumed aromas, tight with bright acidity on the finish, rendering it smooth yet surprisingly linear and crisp on the palate. Subdued and classy, long and layered, with a soft velvety finish. Cannot decide whether to drink or keep!

#### WORLD CHAMPION NV BLANC DE BLANCS

##### Champagne Ruinart NV Blanc de Blancs

12%, 9g (100% Chardonnay)

**Background |** We tasted the 2010-based cuvée, which included 27 percent of reserve wine (two thirds from 2009, one third from 2008) and was disgorged in October 2013. This is possibly the most widely blended blanc de blancs on the market, being sourced from the Côte des Blancs (Vertus, Bergères-lès-Vertus, and Grauves), the Montagne de Reims (Villers-Marmery, Trépail, Taissy and Rilly-la-Montagne), Massif de Saint-Thierry to the west of Reims, Mont Berru to the east of Reims, the Sézannais, and Vitry-le-François. Its clear glass bottle is one of the simplest and most beautiful on the market, but it should carry a government warning because just 60 minutes under artificial lighting or daylight in any clear glass bottle will generate the DMDS “light-struck” aroma that will ruin a Champagne. *Chef de cave* Fred Panaïotis has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure this cuvée is protected throughout its production and aging at

Ruinart itself, but cannot guarantee what happens to it once it has left his control. If you want to taste it in the same pristine condition we did, avoid any bottles that are on display, always purchase bottles that have never left their presentation box, and keep it stored in the same box in a cool dark place until you want to drink it.

**Note |** A youthful, gunpowdery-mineral nose, with floral and lemon-tart notes. Linear, driven palate, super lean and fresh, yet texturally creamy, with a succulent and fruity on the finish.

#### WORLD CHAMPION NV ROSÉ

##### Champagne Charles Heidsieck NV Rosé Réserve

12%, 11.2g (35% Chardonnay, 45% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier)

**Background |** From the most award-winning Champagne maker on the planet, Charles Heidsieck Rosé Réserve includes 20 percent of reserve wines of up to eight years of age. Compare this to the 40 percent of reserve wines of up to ten years used for the Brut Réserve, and it clearly illustrates that *chef de cave* Thierry Roset is looking for a fresher, fruitier emphasis in the rosé. However, the addition of 5–6 percent of six- to seven-year-old red wine is quite mature for coloration, considering that most producers opt for as youthful red as possible, but it is rather clever, since a red wine of this age has already softened, dropping virtually all the sediment it will ever drop. This makes it a far more stable colorant, while any mellowness contributed by such a small component will be merely textural, contributing to the creamy mid-palate mouthfeel. The red wine is quite complex, consisting of Verzy and Verzenay (for the slow maturation, elegance, and mineral notes), Ambonnay (adding a richness that is typical of all Charles Heidsieck blends), Bouzy and Aÿ (for intensity), and Les Riceys (for sunshine and concentration).

**Note |** Gloriously pale, almost blanc de noirs color, with delicate bronze reflections. Beautifully developed fruit aromas, very fine and graceful, with a lovely underlying toastiness. A time-mellowed palate showing powerful, yeast-complexed fruit that is rich, round, and velvety, with a long, silky, sweet finish. Outstanding balance!

#### WORLD CHAMPION VINTAGE BLEND

##### Champagne Les Pionniers 2004 Brut

12%, 11g (39% Chardonnay, 46% Pinot Noir, 15% Meunier)

**Background |** The Co-op’s own-brand Champagne! This is possibly the most amazing result of the entire competition. Prior to the acquisition of Piper-Heidsieck and Charles Heidsieck by Christopher Descours (EPI Group) in 2011, the name of the producer on the Les Pionniers label was P&C Heidsieck, but this was changed in February 2012 to Compagnie Champenoise in line with the policy of most *grande marque* houses that want to distance any

own-label production from their famous brand name. Not that this particular producer should worry—the Non-Vintage Les Pionniers can be very good, but the Vintage Les Pionniers has always been not just very good but outstandingly good. When I was chair of the Champagne panel at the *Decanter* World Wine Awards, we regularly gave the Vintage Les Pionniers a gold medal, and I would have laid money on the 2004 getting a gold at the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, but World Champion Vintage Blend? No, I would not have put money on that. World Champion Supermarket Champagne, yes; and World Champion Greatest Value Champagne, probably. Its toughest hurdle was Best in Class Champagne Vintage Bland, where it just edged out 2000 Charles Heidsieck and 2007 Louis Roederer. How? Well, I suppose it is all down to the art and skill of making a high-quality own-label so that it is *à point* as soon as it is released and remains that way. There will come a time when both 2000 Charles Heidsieck and 2007 Louis Roederer will blow away the 2004 Les Pionniers, but it is always going to be an outstanding Champagne, despite its fantasy label. Unlike so many own-label Champagnes, its strength lies in its superior construction, with components from Le Mesnil-sur-Oger adding class, longevity, and minerality to the rest of this cuvée’s Chardonnay, which comes from the southern part of the Sézanne region. Equally, it is the Pinot Noir from Aÿ and Ambonnay that adds backbone to the rest of this variety, which is sourced mainly from Les Riceys and the Epernay area, while the Meunier is exclusively from the premier cru of Rilly-la-Montagne. The 2004 Les Pionniers is as much a tribute to the winemaking skill of the Piper-Heidsieck and Charles Heidsieck winemaking team, under the direction of Régis Camus, as is the Charles Heidsieck NV Rosé Réserve. Between these two Champagnes, they have racked up no fewer than four World Champion trophies—more than any other producer.

**Note |** Deep lemon-gold color, gorgeously toasty, honeyed, rich, and ripe, evolved aromas, with elegant touches of apricot, pencil shavings, yeast extract, and spice beautifully mirrored on the palate. Amazingly rich and layered. Super-smooth and the softest of mousses, with a highly concentrated, intense, long finish that is velvety and caressing. Superb balance.

#### WORLD CHAMPION VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS

##### Champagne De Castelnu 2002 Blanc de Blancs

12.5%, 10.4g (100% Chardonnay)

**Background |** Produced by Coopérative Régionale des Vins de Champagne (CRVC), which was the original creative force behind the Jacquart brand prior to the formation of Alliance Champagne. Jacquart won heaps of gold and silver medals at the *Decanter* World Wine Awards, particularly in its early years. However, CRVC severed all ties with Jacquart in 2006, since when De Castelnu has become its primary focus, and from the spellbinding performance of its 2002 Blanc de

Blancs, it is obviously on the right track. It was disgorged in February 2013, and the grapes for this Vintage mainly came from Le Mesnil-sur-Oger on the Côte des Blancs, Villedommange on the Petit Montagne between the Ardre and Vesle valleys to the west of Reims, Berru and Nogent l'Abesse on Mont de Berru to the east of Reims, and Verzenay in the Montagne de Reims.

**Note |** Its beautiful, star-bright, lemon-green color is appetizing in itself. Delicate, fine, yeast-complexed aromas mingle with lemon meringue and slowly evolved, deftly balanced sweet notes of toast. Pristine, elegant, long, linear palate, with crisp acids and the silky softness and finesse of a high-gloss, creamy mousse. So pure and pleasurable. High class.

#### WORLD CHAMPION VINTAGE ROSÉ

**Hattingley Valley 2011 Rosé** 12%, 10g (Meunier, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Noir Précoce)

**Background |** Owner Simon Robinson had always told Emma Rice, his bright, young, über-talented winemaker, not to make a rosé. Apparently he did not consider rosé to be a serious wine. How very Champenois! Then, in 2011, a trade customer asked him why Hattingley did not have a rosé, considering how popular the style was and the premium it commanded. In all innocence, he asked Emma why she had not made one, conveniently forgetting that it was his strict instruction. So, she made this rosé, but with most of the 2011 grapes pressed and fermenting away, she was able to make only a relatively small amount. The secret of Emma's rosé is the Pinot Noir Précoce, which, as its name suggests, ripens earlier than other Pinots. In the English climate, it ripens several weeks before most Pinot Noir clones and gives plenty of color with heaps of fresh red fruit. Among the finished wines, some Pinot Noir Précoce had been fermented and had a considerable amount of color. However, it was such a small volume that the amount of white wine already produced from Meunier and Pinot Noir that could be added without removing all the color was extremely limited—thus, only 2,000 bottles were produced. **Note |** Pale peach color, with elegant and delicate fresh apricots on the nose, and fresh, zesty fruit floating on a fine, silky mousse. Long, with a nicely balanced finish that does not appear too sweet.

#### WORLD CHAMPION DELUXE BRUT BLEND

**Dom Pérignon 1996 Oenothèque** 12.5%, 6.5% (50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir)

**Background |** After Dom Pérignon 1996 Oenothèque had been entered into our competition, the range of late-released Dom Pérignon vintages was replaced by P2, but the 1996 Oenothèque remains available. Although 1996 was one of the greatest vintages of the 20th century and produced some magnificent Champagnes, it was also atypical. In Champagne, grapes average 9.5% of potential alcohol and

have more than 53 percent tartaric acid and thus are ripe, contrary to popular myth. In 1996, however, the grapes averaged 10.3%, which would normally be described as super-vintage ripe, but the grapes had a whopping 15.4 grams of total acidity (expressed as tartaric acid) and were not technically ripe. Even so, at 47.5 percent tartaric acid, it was not far off the mythical 50/50 ripeness level. Richard Geoffroy is certain that, given the same conditions, he would have waited a little longer before picking, but as it is, he had to make a concerted effort to avoid the oxidatively prone hyper-concentrated Pinot Noir that ruined so many other 1996s, and with the sublime quality of Dom Pérignon 1996 Oenothèque (disgorged in July 2008), it is very hard to imagine how he could have made a better wine. Geoffroy says, "I cannot see that P3 1996 will be ready for release before 2030-35, and that includes three years' post-disgorgement aging. This vintage is surely bound to live forever!"

**Note |** Lovely, super-bright, lemon-green color, with superbly toasty, yeast-complexed minerality melting into sweet gunpowder on the nose. Extremely complex aromas of nuts, honey, and blossom. Very distinctive. Long, superbly linear fruit kept fresh and lively by a laser-like acidity. Classic, lean structure yet delightfully expansive on the finish. So gracefully poised. Pure class!

#### WORLD CHAMPION DELUXE BLANC DE BLANCS

**Dom Ruinart 2002 Blanc de Blancs** 12.5%, 6.5g (100% Chardonnay)

**Background |** The Dom Ruinart 2002 we tasted was disgorged more than two years earlier, in March 2012, and it needed every day of that post-disgorgement aging to achieve the level of quality we experienced. A point of difference for Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs is that up to one third of the Chardonnay grapes are from the Montagne de Reims grands crus of Sillery and Puisieulx primarily, but also Verzenay and Mailly. In 2002, these grapes accounted for 28 percent of the blend. Sillery was once very famous, but only for still wine, never for sparkling Champagne, while Puisieulx has never been famous for anything! Their vineyards are, however, contiguous with the lower slopes of Verzenay, and planted with Chardonnay rather than the Pinot Noir for which the Montagne de Reims is famed. Sillery and Puisieulx come into their own, contributing an almost Burgundian weight and structure. According to Fred Panaïotis, the current *chef de cave*, 2002 was "a vintage that had everything in balance and didn't miss anything." I would just add that it was a vintage that, rarely for Champagne, shriveled the grapes toward the end of the ripening, and it is the concentration from this *passerillage* that both demands long post-disgorgement aging and will repay further cellaring in the future. It was the very last vintage produced by one of Ruinart's legendary *chefs de caves*, François Barrot. As Panaïotis says, "I can only hope that I'll finish my career on such a high note!"

**Note |** A medium-deep lemon color. Highly stylish, gunpowder-complexed nose, with a lovely lemony touch, very pure and mineral. Super-tight and lean, yet round and creamy. Very dry, with a long and driven finish. Obviously great, but it desperately needs more time to show its true finesse.

#### WORLD CHAMPION DELUXE ROSÉ

**Champagne Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé**

See *Supreme World Champion*

#### WORLD CHAMPION SPARKLING RED WINE

**Grant Burge NV Shiraz Cabernet** 14%, 25.75g (62% Shiraz, 37% Cabernet Sauvignon)

**Background |** The Shiraz was sourced from the Barossa and Eden Valleys, while most of the Cabernet Sauvignon was grown in Grant Burge's own Barossa vineyards. Both varieties were crushed and fermented separately and left on skins a short time, pumped over three times a day, and finished their first fermentation in old puncheons of French and American oak, where they were aged for 15-18 months. After blending, the wine underwent a second fermentation in bottle, where it remained on yeast 18 months before being disgorged and a 1996 Vintage Port-style fortified wine added for *dosage*.

**Note |** Strong, vinous, raspberry aromas, with bright, bold fruit flavors that are sweet, ripe, round, and well balanced, with some yeast-complexed aromas and silky tannins adding length to the finish, which is gently lifted by a velvety mousse.

#### OTHER WORLD CHAMPIONS

#### WORLD CHAMPION SUPERMARKET CHAMPAGNE

**Champagne Les Pionniers 2004 Brut**

See *World Champions by Style*

#### WORLD CHAMPION GREATEST VALUE CHAMPAGNE

**Champagne Les Pionniers 2004 Brut**

See *World Champions by Style*

#### WORLD CHAMPION GREATEST VALUE SPARKLING WINE

**Freixenet 2012 Cuvée de Prestige Trépat** 12%, 9g (100% Trépat)

**Background |** Trépat has traditionally been used to color *rosado* Cava but never as a pure varietal until Freixenet produced this cuvée in 1998.

**Note |** Full of freshness and fun, this pale-pink rosé has delicate, fragrant fruity/floral aromas and is really delightful to drink, with its crisp, fruit-driven style and light, fresh, dry finish.

#### WORLD CHAMPION NV MAGNUM

**Champagne Pommery NV Brut Royal** (magnum)

See *World Champions by Style*

#### WORLD CHAMPION VINTAGE MAGNUM

**Ca' del Bosco 2005 Cuvée Annamaria Clementi** (magnum) 12.5%, 3.5g (55% Chardonnay, 25% Pinot Blanc, 20% Pinot Noir)

**Background |** Ca' del Bosco was founded in 1968 by Maurizio Zanella. He made his first sparkling wine in 1976 and, in 1989, named this special cuvée for his mother. She passed away in 2014 but would have been very proud that her talented son had been honored with this World Champion trophy. Cuvée Annamaria Clementi is for me the best and most consistent brut-style sparkling wine produced in all of Italy. No one, not even Ca' del Bosco's own competitors, would deny the extraordinary quality of this wine or

the great contribution that Zanella has made to Franciacorta. Cuvée Annamaria Clementi is vinified exclusively in barriques, where the wine remains on its lees for six months after the first fermentation. After bottling, this cuvée remains in contact with its yeast for at least seven years (the magnums we tasted were disgorged in 2013) and is disgorged in the absence of oxygen by a unique system designed and patented by Ca' del Bosco. Another unique feature of this winery is that all grapes are washed and dried three times.

**Note |** A bright, medium-deep, lemon-straw color, this stylish, smart, super-complex sparkling wine offers a smooth and arresting aroma with just the right level of underlying smooth toastiness. Mellow yet fresh with a good weight of yeast-complexed Chardonnay fruit on the palate, followed by finely tuned Pinot Noir pencil shavings. Long, elegant, and definitively dry, yet with satisfying impression of sweetness on the finish. So smooth, so complete: sublime!

#### WORLD CHAMPION DELUXE MAGNUM

**Champagne Laurent-Perrier NV Grand Siècle** (magnum) 12%, 9.6g (55% Chardonnay, 45% Pinot Noir)

**Background |** Always a pure grand cru blend of three vintages, with the current year (at the time

of blending) and the two most recent previous vintages declared by Laurent-Perrier as reserves. At the time of the competition, the bottles were 2002-based but the magnums were 1999-based, and the magnums we tasted were disgorged in September 2013. The older vintages are kept in small stainless-steel vats, each holding a varietal base wine from a different village: Chardonnay from Avize, Chouilly, Cramant, Le Mesnil, Oger, Oiry, and Tour-sur-Marne; and Pinot Noir from Ambonnay, Bouzy, Louvois, Mailly, Tour-sur-Marne, Verzenay, and Verzy. Although the bottle design was chosen for historic and aesthetic reasons, its long, narrow neck also guards against oxidation, contributing to this Champagne's graceful aging. All bottles are sealed with a cork for the second fermentation and kept at least seven years on yeast. They have to be riddled and disgorged manually. The difference between bottles and magnums has to be tasted to be believed—not just because they are probably different blends, but because the magnums are always smoother, more complete and satisfying. **Note |** Super-bright, medium-deep lemon color. Slowly evolved, fine, and delicate nose, with complex gunpowder and coffee aromas that are refined and fine-tuned but will be even more sensational in five years or so, when all the gunpowdery fruit has turned deliciously toasty. Incredibly complex palate. Layer upon layer of elegant, fleshy, fresh fruit, long and linear, with plenty of potential left.



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