

# ALL FOR ONE, AND ONE FOR ALL? SINGLE-VINEYARD CHAMPAGNE

Houses may have been the early pioneers, but over the past ten years growers have sent the number of single-vineyard Champagnes rocketing, to 120 and rising. **Tom Stevenson** introduces a tasting shared with **Essi Avellan MW** and **Andrew Jefford** in which they set out to identify the rare sites that really merit such special treatment and the producers who translate them most successfully

**J**ust over 20 years ago, in a Champagne supplement of the now defunct *Wine* magazine, I wrote, “The Champenois are waking up to the concept of single-vineyard wines,” but inexplicably it was the houses, those bastions of region-wide blends, who were waking up, not the growers. Logic should surely have dictated that it would be Champagne growers who had the most to gain from pioneering wines of specific terroir—but in the early '90s, they were still fast asleep. As I noted at the time, “Of the region’s 4,700 growers, I cannot find one who actually sells his Champagne by the name of an individual vineyard, a practice that is, amazingly, totally dominated by the houses.”

## **First single-vineyard Champagne**

That statement was not strictly accurate when I made it in 1993. Some growers were making single-vineyard Champagnes, but not selling them as such, though a tiny number had done precisely that. Denois in Cumières, for example, used to produce a good single-vineyard Champagne in the '70s and '80s called *Cuvée des Côtes-à-Bras*. It was such a novelty to serve an easily affordable Champagne from a single, identifiable plot of soil that I used to buy the odd case just before returning home from my trips to the region.

I used to think that Clos des Goisses was the oldest single-vineyard Champagne (Philipponnat, 1935), but Clos du Mesnil dates back much further as a grower Champagne. Originally called Clos de la Chapitre (named by the monks of St-Étienne de Châlons), this *clos* came into Tarin family ownership when Amédée Tarin (1829–1903) married Fanny Clauzet in 1860. From this juncture, the vineyard was often referred to locally as Clos Tarin, but Amédée sold it not as Clos de la Chapitre or, indeed, Clos Tarin but as Clos du Mesnil. He made at least two *cuvées*—a Blanc de Blancs Nature and a Rosé (and given the era and location, this might have been colored with locally grown Gamay vin rouge). Tarin’s *chef de cave* was Marcel Guillaume, and he was often assisted by his brother-in-law, who was none other than Eugène-Aimé Salon, thus endowing this plot of sacred Champenois soil with the precursor not only to Krug Clos du Mesnil but also to Salon, two of the most iconic Champagnes today.

Clos du Moulin was another pioneer of the single-vineyard concept, having been made by Cattier since 1952. But the concept of single-vineyard Champagne was not to become widely appreciated for several decades. With even passionate aficionados of the world’s greatest sparkling wine ignorant of

these single-vineyard Champagnes, Clos des Goisses and Clos du Moulin remained “sommelier secrets,” known only to a minuscule number of the most well-heeled customers who frequented some of the very best Michelin-starred restaurants. At this time, however, Tarin’s Clos du Mesnil was not even a “sommelier secret.” Nobody had heard of either Tarin or this vineyard. It was not until Krug (who purchased Clos du Mesnil in 1972) made a splash with the launch of its first vintage (1979) in 1986 that the market began to understand the concept of a single-vineyard Champagne. We woke up to the fact that Drappier’s Grande Sèndrée was a single-vineyard Champagne (circa 1993), then Leclerc-Briant released its trio of Les Authentiques (1994), and there was a bit of a gap until Moët launched its ill-fated Trilogie des Grands Crus (2001). Billecart-Salmon gave us the first vintage (1995) of its Clos St-Hilaire (2003) and Taittinger quietly released its Les Folies de la Marquetterie (2004). The houses had woken up to the concept of single-vineyard Champagne, but the growers were still fast asleep. However, as these wines gained traction, with some of them demanding very high prices, so a new generation of growers woke up to its possibilities and started crafting a raft of their own single-vineyard Champagnes.

By 2005, the number of these wines had increased to the point where they represented an emerging phenomenon of sufficient importance for Essi Avellan to submit a dissertation for her Master of Wine examination, titled “Antithesis of Champagne: Single Vineyard Style Wines.” This study encompassed 16 producers of single-vineyard Champagne, including no fewer than six growers. Then in 2007, Krug’s Clos d’Ambonnay exploded on to the market with a crazy price of \$3,500, and if anything woke up the growers, it was

the effect of this wine dragging up the price not only of Clos du Mesnil, which then seemed absurdly cheap, but of all the other prestige cuvées as well. As the price hikes continued through, and despite, the “economic meltdown” of 2008, everyone and their dog started making single-vineyard Champagnes. By 2013, when Essi updated *Christie’s World Encyclopedia of Champagne & Sparkling Wine* (Absolute Press), she was able to compile an astonishing list of 118 single-vineyard Champagnes, sold by 61 producers, the vast majority of which were growers.

### What is the raison d’être?

The core question is, Do single-vineyard Champagnes exist because they have any inherent ability to produce something extraordinary on a consistent basis? In my experience of watching how individual vineyards perform over 35 vintages, the two that stand out in this respect are Clos des Goisses and Clos du Mesnil, but for completely different reasons.

It is the unique topography of Clos des Goisses (which always allows some parcels to excel)—in conjunction with its high active-lime content (30 percent compared to 25 percent throughout the rest of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ) and significantly warmer microclimate (2.7°F [1.5°C] higher mean temperature during the growing season)—that endows this vineyard with the intrinsic ability to produce something special, whereas it is the walls around Clos du Mesnil (and the buildings around those walls) that magnify the potential of what would otherwise be a good but not exceptional vineyard. Many *clos* are not true *clos* because they are not completely enclosed by walls. Most have no walls at all, but even those with a wall are not always true *clos*. Clos des Goisses has a wall, but it is not a true *clos* because its wall is a retaining wall, enclosing nothing. On the other hand, some true

### TOM STEVENSON’S TOP WINES

Ulysse Collin Les Pierrières Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV <b>19</b>
Cédric Bouchard Roses de Jeanne Côte de Val Vilaine Brut NV <b>18.5</b>
Michel Lorient Monodié en Meunier Majeur Les Virtuoses Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut 2007 <b>18.5</b>
Pommery Les Clos Pampadour Reims Brut (magnum) Mise en Cave 2003 <b>18.5</b>
Jérôme Prévost La Closerie Les Béguines Extra Brut NV <b>18.5</b>
Franck Bonville Les Belles Voyes Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV <b>18</b>
Janisson-Baradon Conges Brut 2006 <b>18</b>
Coessens Lieu-dit Lagillier Brut Nature 2010 <b>18</b>
Coessens Lieu-dit Lagillier Blanc de Noirs Brut NV <b>18</b>
Champagne Pierre Gerbais Celles-sur-Ource Reserve 100% Côtes des Bar Extra Brut NV <b>18</b>
Krug Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut 2003 <b>18</b>
Champagne Tarlant la Vigne d’Antan Non Greffée Chardonnay Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2002 <b>18</b>

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*clos* have more effect than others. Clos du Mesnil, for example, is not just a true *clos*, it’s a super-*clos*. It is so cut off from its surroundings that you only have to walk through it on a spring day to feel its very different “sense of place,” something I never get at Clos d’Ambonnay. The walls around Krug’s Clos d’Ambonnay are much lower, leaving the vines almost as exposed as the surrounding vineyards that have no walls. It is a true *clos*, but if Clos d’Ambonnay is an exceptional Champagne, it is because Krug applies its own mantra, and it could easily achieve the same or better results in many of the surrounding vineyards that have no walls.

Other exceptional single-vineyard sites must of course exist in a region as large and as diverse as Champagne, but I suspect their number is small. Although there are thousands of *lieux-dits* that produce exceptional *vins clairs* every year, they deliver wines that are superior to the surrounding vineyards as *vin clair* components, but they are not necessarily capable of producing complete Champagnes in themselves, even in the highly individual style of a single-vineyard. And where there are exceptional sites that are capable of producing complete Champagnes, man (or woman) is still the joker in the pack. When nature deals a solitary plot of land the requisites for an exceptional terroir, man has to live up to that potential by his actions in the vineyard and winery. Sometimes he does; sometimes he doesn’t. As Andrew so eloquently puts it here, “The work of the grower is the lens (or the screen) for terroir.”

### The tasting

For this single-vineyard Champagne tasting, 60 wines were submitted by 38 producers, mostly growers, including five who were not even in Essi Avellan’s list of just two years ago. This clearly



illustrates how fast-growing this embryonic category of Champagne is.

Essi highlighted the “low- or no-*dosage* policies [that are] aiming for maximum authenticity and transparency,” and there was indeed an above-average proportion of Brut Nature (18 percent) and Extra Brut Champagnes (40 percent) in this tasting. In his summary, Andrew states a preference for Extra Brut, whereas Essi and I had preference for Brut, but it was far less marked. The inherent difficulty of producing a low- or no-*dosage* style in Champagne is due to its intrinsically lean structure, so when it does work and the result is harmonious, it must be applauded. It is much easier to produce such styles in Franciacorta, where the slightly warmer climate provides a plumper base wine, whereas low- and no-*dosage* styles are difficult for Trentodoc, which has a much leaner structure.

Surprisingly, no fewer than 26 of the 60 wines were Non-Vintage, and you have to wonder about such a development. Is it a logical strategy for single-vineyard Champagnes to be produced and sold without a vintage? How a vineyard responds to the climate is one of the most essential elements of terroir. Each year the terroir imprints itself on a wine according to how the vines have responded to that vintage, and thus a single vintage is a pure expression of individual terroir. This is lost when blending two or more years. Losing the pure expression of individual terroir does not necessarily devalue its quality. Eight of my top 12 wines were Non-Vintage, as were six of Essi's top 13. Only Andrew had a clear preference for Vintage, with just two of his top 11 wines being Non-Vintage. Still, the fact that a Non-Vintage grabbed any of the top spots—even just two, as in Andrew's case—demonstrates that a lack of specific terroir expression does not detract from the quality of a

Champagne. It is more about being true to the concept of terroir and how a producer—particularly a grower-producer—presents his domaine.

It goes without saying that all Non-Vintage single-vineyard Champagnes should carry an easily understood code indicating the age and, ideally, disgorgement date, much like Ulysse Collin and others do. This is a basic requirement, whether the Champagne is from a single vintage or not. If it is from a single vintage and is being released after three years of age, then it is ridiculous not to proudly show its vintage. If it is from a single vintage and is being released after less than three years of age, then it does not deserve to be promoted as a single-vineyard Champagne, because in all but a few rare (and unpredictably occasional) cases, an exceptional terroir will require more than three years on yeast to show its potential. If it is not from a single vintage and the only reason for labeling it as a single-vineyard is simply to express a point of difference between a grower's Champagne and the region-wide blends

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of a major house, then do not devalue single-vineyards in the process. Simply prefix the producer's name with “Domaine,” and highlight “Estate Bottled” on the front label. It is the ability to use these two terms—not single-vineyard names—that defines a grower's point of difference. The use of “Domaine” and “Estate Bottled” endows growers with the terroir-specific reputation they crave.

### The results

The growers not only dominated this tasting in terms of numbers, but they also dominated it from a quality perspective, claiming 24 of our combined 36 top-placed wines. That is not to say that the houses did not do well. Essi in particular was partial to the style of the houses, putting Krug Clos du Mesnil, Philipponnat Clos des Goisses, and Pommery Les Clos Pompadour in equal first place; Taittinger Folies de la Marquetterie second; Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Juste Rosé equal third; and Cattier Clos du Moulin, Drappier Grande Sendrée Rosé, and Thiénot La Vigne aux Gamins equal fourth. I had Pommery Les Clos Pompadour in equal second place and Krug Clos du Mesnil equal third, while Andrew had Duval Leroy Clos des Bouveries equal second and Thiénot La Vigne aux Gamins equal fourth.

On reflection, I was happy with my score for the 2005 Clos de Goisses, though I placed it only equal seventh. It did not show anywhere near as well as it did when I tasted it in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ just four months earlier. At that time, it was bursting with peach-laden fruit and yet showed great finesse, which is a pretty impressive combination to pull off at the best of times. It is a matter of disgorgement, I think. When initially disgorged, it can shine very brightly, then it goes through phases of differing appeal for approximately the next three years,

after which it just gets better and better (under ideal storage conditions, of course). If you take my blind-tasting scores for Clos des Goisses from all sources and sort them by disgorgement date, the scores for those with less than three years' post-disgorgement aging are all over the place, but those with three years or more are all very high scores indeed.

As for the Clos des Goisses Juste Rosé, the 2005 is not one of its best vintages. Having tasted forward at Philipponnat a few times, the 2006 Juste is clearly a much more elegant and expressive year, while the 2007 is better still. However, it is the 2008 that will be the real stunner. In fact I'm straining at the leash awaiting the release of the 2008 Clos des Goisses itself, which is possibly its greatest-ever vintage.

Essi scored Krug Clos du Mesnil 2003 much higher, but again I am happy with my score. With toasty post-disgorgement bottle aromas taking hold, it showed a lot better than it did at the Clos itself last October, when the oak was far too dominant. However, it is not anywhere near the same class as Clos du Mesnil 2000 or, indeed, Krug's Vintage 2003, which is definitely a 19–20-point Champagne, thus 18 and equal third is a fair score and place for the Clos du Mesnil 2003.

There were several grower Champagnes I was either pleased with or pleasantly surprised by, even beyond my top wines, but I was particularly impressed by the immaculate quality of Ulysse Collin, Cédric Bouchard, and Jérôme Prévost. Collin might overdo the oak, but he overdoes it in a way that works, with the right kind of oak, and he fills that oak to the brim with the most majestic, creamy, Burgundian-style fruit, giving it a voluptuous Meursault-like feel. On the other hand, Bouchard (technically not a grower) and Prévost lean away from excess, toward

#### AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	15.5	7.5–19
EA	15.5	10–19
AJ	15	10–18.5
TS	15.5	7.5–19

**THE GROWERS NOT ONLY DOMINATED THIS TASTING IN TERMS OF NUMBERS, BUT THEY ALSO DOMINATED IT FROM A QUALITY PERSPECTIVE, WITH 24 OF OUR COMBINED 36 TOP-PLACED WINES. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE HOUSES DID NOT DO WELL**

purity and finesse. They have both been among my favorite growers—or, at least, boutique Champagne producers—in the past.

#### Caveat emptor

Essi is absolutely right when she points out in her summary the difficulty of producing Champagne in small batches. She is also correct in highlighting the heavy-handed use of oak, which can only obscure the expression of terroir. But I would go further than she does when she describes low sulfur use as “challenging”; I would call it downright irresponsible. I need to clarify, however, that we are not discussing total sulfur, because even at the highest levels, the total sulfur in Champagne is significantly lower than that found in other wines. The problem is when the sulfur is added and, in particular, the amount of sulfur that is added immediately prior to final corking. When Champagne is disgorged, it is released from a totally reductive environment, where it has become acutely sensitive to the presence of oxygen. It is at this very moment that it is subjected to the oxidative shock of disgorgement and receives dissolved oxygen from the *dosage* wine. If a producer is intent on achieving a low-sulfur regime, it is on this critical juncture that he must concentrate his efforts. Get the sums wrong, and the wine might show beautifully for a while but will then start to build up coarse, aldehydic aromas that will strip away the fruit and finesse of the wine. Check the notes in this tasting. If there is more than one Champagne from the same producer and none of the tasters noted any oxidative indicators in one of those wines but did in another, ask yourself whether that producer ever intended to produce an oxidative style in just one of his Champagnes. You will find more than a few, so my advice is to drink on purchase.



CB = Clear Bottle

**Jérôme Prévost La Closerie  
Les Béguines Extra Brut NV** | 18  
(12.5% ABV)

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Fine, toasty, rich, and evolved nose. Sweet fruitiness and plenty of depth. Gorgeous coffee and cream notes, with burned-sugar charred nuances. Promises a lot. Mature on the palate, with age-derived calmness. Full-bodied and crisp, with good linearity. At a great drinking age now, with some potential left to improve. | 18

**AJ** | Fuller gold, rather torpid mousse. Terrific breadly aromas here; like stumbling into the boulangerie shortly after five in the morning. Very enticing. Deep, full, rich and very generous for an Extra Brut, with wonderful-quality raw material: grand architecture of fruit, vinosity, length, sap, and wealth. Completely dry, yet doesn't seem dry or drawn at all; lovely flesh on the sculpted cheekbone. Rigor, purity, and generosity; hard to better that. Whose vineyard? | 18

**TS** | Youthful toastiness in the aroma and on the finish. Nicely timed disgorgement. Lovely mid-palate plumpness derived from good yeast-aging. A classically constructed Champagne of individual style and character. | 18.5

**Veuve Fourny Cuvée du Clos  
Notre Dame Premier Cru  
Monopole Extra Brut 2005** | 17.5  
(12% ABV)

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Stylishly harmonious nose with finely detailed, sweet, fruitiness; underlying toasty complexity; and heaps of healthy fruit. Fresh and vibrant, a super-succulent, intense palate with lovely acid line. Great structure. Dry, but takes it very well. Some woody notes and flirtations with oxidation, but manages it all. An interesting, soulful Champagne. | 18

**AJ** | Bright lemon-gold. Fresh, clean, full of lemon elegance, and has some secondary stony complexities, too. An excellent aromatic profile. Very intense, concentrated, mouthwatering, searching and long; a lemon explosion, almost. There is damp chalk behind, but the primary starburst is so strong that you barely notice it. Very exciting vineyard Champagne from a fine site. Vinous length carries the finish, and there are more lemony perfumes to get you pouring the next glass after you have swallowed. | 17.5

**TS** | Fresh, sumptuous fruit supported by a pin-cushion mousse. Not the longest or most intense wine of the tasting, but one of the better. | 17

**Roger Brun Cuvée des Sires  
Aÿ-La Pelle Grand Cru  
Extra Brut 2008** (12% ABV) | 17

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Earthy, spice driven nose, with ripe red fruit and charred and nutty notes. Oxidative tendencies, but these are under control. The palate is fresh yet round and wide, with a slightly foamy mousse. Serious and gastronomic style, slightly too dry. Fine acidity. Has character. | 16.5

**AJ** | Pale to mid-gold; steady mousse. Lots of

powdered stone and leaf sap, with the fruit notes somehow sublimated and lifted so that they are no longer merely fruit. You smell the fruited vinosity more than the pure fruit itself. Vinous, long, driving and rewarding in the mouth; both lean and aerodynamic, yet full and allusive too. Sappy and fine, and some ground stone in the finish, too. Just a little bit austere overall. | 17.5

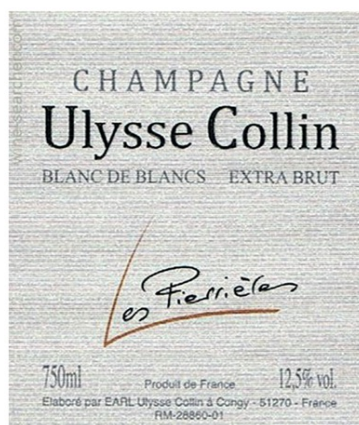
**TS** | A substantial cuvée with a fabulously lean, acid bent. The fruit here makes an unforgettable impression on the palate. Long, persistent, and penetrating. | 17.5

**Ulysse Collin Les Pierrières  
Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV** | 17  
(12.5% ABV)

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Soft fudge-and-apple nose. Underlying biscuity and leesy complexity, with sweet vanilla notes and oaky tones. Mild oxidative note. Positively crisp palate, fluffy mousse and mouth-filling, round texture. | 15.5

**AJ** | Lemon-gold; gentle mousse. Soft, lemony, piled knickerbocker-high with whipped cream: attractive and well away from the faintly dour aromatic norm of the dryer end of the tasting. By contrast, there's scant evidence of the aromatic contours on the palate; this is a quite a steely, lunging, sappy Champagne, with a stony finish. An attractive combination; clever cellar work from what is presumably a cooler site. A little new oak snuck in here? It's just a little bit too taut and green at the very end for me for a really high score, but well worth buying and trying. | 16.5

**TS** | Oaky, but beautifully oaky. The lemony oak is not seamless but does melt into the fruit, which is deliciously spicy, and remains there all the way through its long, tapering finish. I'm not a great lover of oak in Champagne, but I have to take my hat off to this cuvée, which has elegance, class, and finesse. Gorgeous! | 19



**Duval-Leroy Clos des Bouveries  
Brut 2004** (12.5% ABV) | 17

**EA** | Medium-deep golden. Rich, evolved, toffee nose showing tertiary complexity. Starts to tire a bit on the palate, and oxidation is notable. Strong

## A HIGHLY ARTICULATE AROMATIC PROFILE FULL OF WARM, LEMONY FRUIT, COLD POUNDED BUTTER, AND A LITTLE SEAWEEDEY FRESHNESS, TOO. RICH AND STRUCTURED ON THE PALATE, WITH A DEEPLY “MINERAL” FLAVOR

and cloying. Highly enjoyable, nonetheless. | 17

**AJ** | Full gold; delicate mousse. A highly articulate aromatic profile full of warm, lemony fruit, cold pounded butter, and a little seaweedy freshness, too. Rich and structured on the palate, with a deeply “mineral” flavor—lots of moist sand and moist chalk to support the beguiling lemon. Remarkably full-flavored, rich in personality, and has a sense of place: excellent vineyard Champagne. | 18

**TS** | Somewhat oxidative aroma leads to a creamy-rich palate that seems to promise more than it gives. | 16.5



**Champagne Tarlant La Vigne  
d'Antan Non Greffée Chardonnay  
Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature  
2002** (12% ABV) | 17

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon-gold. Nose is really intense: It is age-mellowed, soft, and appears sweet, with toffee apple, honey, and floral tones. Big, bold palate with fine acidity. Slightly grippy and dry at the finish, thus shortening the taste. Oxidative character barely under control. | 15

**AJ** | Full gold and gentle mousse. Plenty of age here, and we are gracefully getting into the walnuty phase. Full, developed, evolved, vinous, and firm, with both creamy hazels and a bite of the darker walnut notes. Very successful as a Brut Nature: The balance is impeccable, and the wine carries so well into the finish without any cloying

platitudinousness. Fruit and stone at the last, as it should be. Grand stuff. Rewardingly difficult flavors—that's why we're here. | 18.5

**TS** | Beginning to show its age, yet offers some intriguingly ripe and mature notes. The 2002 vintage is perhaps winning the battle against the terroir, but the result is very gastro-friendly. I would love to see this at the table. More interesting than any great finesse, but that said, it is very interesting indeed. | 18



**Taittinger Folies de la Marquetterie Brut NV** (12.5% ABV) | 17

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Fresh, stylishly subdued nose with creamy complexity and emerging toasty depth. Sweet fruitiness. Fine, firm, balanced palate full of pristine fruit. Delicate, reductive gunpowder notes underneath. Joyous, but has character, too. Still tight, and will benefit from a few years' extra keeping. | 18.5

**AJ** | Full gold with steady mousse. Aromatically this isn't hugely allusive at first, but it's correct and it resists easy summary, which is always a good sign; you may get more with the air contact. Lemon, touch of pine, pollen, brioche, given that time. Boisterous, exuberant and sherbetty on the palate, but concentrated and long, too, and there is nice backing richness from the lees contact. Well-crafted wine from good raw materials. Not in any way difficult or austere; a good introductory single-vineyard Champagne. | 15.5

**TS** | Soft, sweet, and yet decidedly brut, with a creamy finish. | 17.5

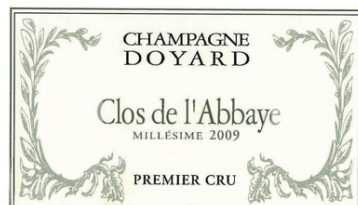


**Champagne Doyard Clos de l'Abbaye Premier Cru Extra Brut 2009** (12% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Deep lemon-gold color. Stylish, positively restrained nose, with earthy spiciness and ripe red-apple fruitiness. A very intense palate, which finishes a touch austere. Serious, vinous style. Muscular and firm. The sweetness comes at the very finish. Nice, aged richness. | 17

**AJ** | Pale to mid-green-gold. Green apple sherbet, with a dusting of icing sugar—enticing. This is excellent: a much bigger wine on the palate than the aromas suggested it might be, with excellent fruit architecture and aromatic resonance. Long, full, fresh, vivid. The finish is a seamless blend of green sappy fruit and stony finesse. Vinous. Rigorous yet rewarding, and takes a lot of scrutiny. Tightly green in the finish, but ripe withal. | 17

**TS** | High acids make for intense, linear fruit, but this wine is not talking much beyond that... Perhaps could have been disgorged later? | 16



**Champagne Pierre Gerbais Celles-sur-Ource Reserve 100%-Côtes des Bar Extra Brut NV** (12% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Pale lemon. Stylish, clean, fruity nose, beautifully lined with toast and vanilla. Positive aging aromas are starting to emerge. Charming, fragrant character. There is a lot happening on the palate, too. Intense and zesty, but unnecessarily dry and tight nature. A character of its own. | 17.5

**AJ** | Fuller gold; seething, snowy mousse. Rather confined, Bakelite aromas; not an aromatic charmer as first poured. Perhaps it will be better for the other tasters, who will come to this bottle a little later than me. Concentrated, straightforward palate, with chunky apple and

**LOVELY, FRESH, APPLE-PURÉE AROMA, BUT MORE PINEAPPLE ON THE PALATE. RICH WITHOUT BEING HEAVY, AND REFRESHINGLY CLEAN OF ANY OXIDATIVE OR ALDEHYDIC AROMAS**

green grape. A sound Champagne to drink, but it lacks aromatic charm in my glass. | 14

**TS** | Young, fresh and moreish. I'm not sure that this evokes any "sense of place," but it does have classic structure, a delicious amplexness of fruit, great acids, and a very long finish in which it is the fruit that remains in control. A lovely Champagne. | 18

**Champagne Pierre Gerbais L'Originale 100% Pinot Blanc Extra Brut NV** (12% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Fresh, fragrant, and floral, even candied, fruit-forward nose. Appears sweet on the mid palate even if the finish is very dry. Long, intense and fresh, but not very complex or elegant. | 15.5

**AJ** | Pale gold; gentle mousse. Crushed chalk, green apple; a discreet aromatic profile; sappy. Deep, searching, plunging, scouring fruits, but ripe withal. A long and penetrating finish. Intense, edgy, nervy Champagne; almost nettley; but good. | 16

**TS** | Pale color. Lovely, fresh, apple-purée aroma, but more pineapple on the palate. Rich without being heavy, and refreshingly clean of any oxidative or aldehydic aromas. | 17.5



**Krug Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut 2003** (12.5% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Deep golden. Strong, oaky, charred, super-intense nose showing beautiful evolution and yeasty and toasty depth. Really powerful, with mild oxidative notes but backed up by plenty of acidity and vibrancy. This is still youthful, and the oak will get better integrated over time. | 19

**AJ** | Full lemon-yellow with an excellent, sustained, fine-beaded mousse. It looks so good that I was geared up for a great aroma—but alas, this smells rather varnished. There is some plant and seaweed behind. The palate is very acid-dominated, a little hard. Good, concentrated Champagne, but lacks aromatic grace and charm. Biting, faintly bitter-edged finish, which makes for a cleansing effect but cannot redeem the charmlessness. | 13

**TS** | Toasty aromas dominate. Surprisingly high



acids for the year (2003, the only information the tasters were given). Definitely a food wine. | 18



## Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Juste Rosé Brut 2005 (13% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Pale peachy. Really stylish, toast-lined Pinot nose, with pastry and soft spiciness. Strong, fleshy, and structured palate, with subdued power underneath the velvety body. It has both character and appeal. Great gastronomic style with aging capacity; young still. | 18

**AJ** | Pale orange-red; steady mousse. Complex, developed, softly nutty, but plenty too; sappy and fresh. Complex, subtle, and very attractive. Deep, searching, even vaulting fruit, with lots of vinous structure and complexity, and some fine finishing perfumes. Very secondary and developed: real wine, and a good food choice. Plenty of sense of place behind, in the sappy, vinous, faintly earthy core. Not a rosé for Valentine's Day, but gastronomically satisfying. | 16.5

**TS** | Pale salmon color. High, somewhat hard acidity. Lacks elegance. | 15

## Francois Secondé À Sillery Grand Cru Brut 2008 (12% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Pale lemon. Nose is pristinely clean, with sweet white fruit, lemon and confectionary. Super zesty, lean, tight, and focused. Fine, stony, mineral expression. Lightweight, yet an intense and elegant palate, with heaps of succulent fruit. Superb quality fruit and beautifully balanced dosage. Simply invigorating in its razor-sharpness. A palate cleanser. | 19

**AJ** | Deep green-gold. Earthy, planty, sappy, and fresh: enticing aromas. Rich, tangy; plenty of dosage here, but a long, vinous follow-through helps carry and support the wine. Developed fruit, ample ripeness, but at the same time plenty of sap and leafy freshness: very complete and attractive. The wine dries and finds some mineral resource on the finish. Exuberant and characterful, if unsavory. | 14.5

**TS** | Rich, a touch oxidative; a very tight and linear line of yeast-complexed fruit to the finish. | 15.5

## Champagne Tarlant La Vigne d'Or Blanc de Meuniers Oeuilly Brut Nature 2004 (12% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Aged nose with sweet floral and honey tones, nuts, and confectionary.

Great acidity on the palate, feels much fresher than what was suggested by the calm nose. Mild oxidative notes, but not too much. Super-dry but it can take it. Great intensity and beautiful skeleton. Palate-cleansing freshness. Unique style. | 16.5

**AJ** | Full gold; languid mousse. Bready and rich to smell; the yeasts have left their mark, but these notes are painted over a cushion of soft, sweet fruit. Rather understated aromatically, as most of the Brut Nature wines are, but attractive all the same. On the palate, this is a richer, more open-pored Champagne than the often tight and clenched-jawed norm for Brut Nature: long, articulate, and based on beautifully ripened fruit, which really carries the wine and gives it lift and expressiveness. Mineral, salty finish once the fruit has foamed down. Quite delicious and a very successful Brut Nature from somewhere or other propitious. Now where? | 17.5

**TS** | If you're in the zone of oxidative-styled Champagne, this has an impressive intensity and length without creating too much weight and a lovely, soft mousse of minuscule bubbles. This is, no doubt, due to its extensive yeast contact. Although already ten years old, this could be kept longer. | 16

## Thiénot La Vigne aux Gamins Cuvée de 3435/1 Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 (12% ABV) | 16.5

**EA** | Medium lemon-green. Nose is attractive, sweet and fruit-packed, with beautiful toast emerging underneath. Vanilla, cream, vegetal notes, and tropical fruit. Smooth, viscous, gentle palate with great intensity. Mature and mellow already, almost peaking. Fine, comforting, rich and soft style but has some overwhelming lactic and vegetal tones. | 17.5

**AJ** | Full lemon-yellow with a delicate, languid mousse. Rather inarticulate initially, but later some shyly attractive aromas emerge—broom and acacia. (The first bottle had cardboardy notes, but the second bottle was better and aromatically purer.) On the palate, it is more elegant and fresher than many of its peers in the Brut class. A lively, graceful, and vital Champagne, and remarkably youthful still, too, with enticing perfumes: The acacia and broom are very well drawn. The only thing holding it back from one of the highest scores is a slight brittleness of style, but this is nevertheless an excellent, lemony-fresh, springtime Champagne, with some miles left under its belt: well crafted and well preserved. | 17

**TS** | First bottle: blown wheat. Second bottle: cleaner, fresher, but with malolactic showing through. | 14.5

## Cattier Clos du Moulin Premier Cru Rosé Brut NV (12.5% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Medium-deep peachy rose color. The first bottle was corked. Second bottle: Full-on, winy Pinot style with notes of strawberry, raspberry, and the undergrowth. Velvet-textured and smooth on the vinous palate. Not your conventional Champagne rosé; in a Burgundian

style, but successfully so. Individual, but with appeal and elegance. | 17.5

**AJ** | Pale orange-pink. Attractive, leafy, and soft, with the red-fruit notes well modulated into the sweeter, more lemony blending elements: harmonious and enticing. On the palate, by contrast, this is a little less subtle in style at first, with a forceful acid component. Once that has worked its way through the central palate, though, the wine settles down. Characterful, exuberant, and rewarding overall. | 15.5

**TS** | Good drinking Champagne, but I'm not sure I would know that I was drinking anything from a specific vineyard. | 15.5

## Coessens Lieu-Dit Lagillier Brut Nature 2010 (12% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Pale lemon-green colour. Nose is mild and clean, with hints of subtle white fruit. Muted. Crisp, energetic palate with tension. High acidity, but there is enough fruit to back it. Takes its brut nature rather well, even if the finish is razor-sharp. The energy is its best feature. | 15.5

**AJ** | Very pale and a swarm of fine bubbles. Yeast-related scents do most of the aromatic work here, satisfyingly enough. Dry, refined flavors; medium length; balanced and tapered, with some stoniness in the finish. Not hugely characterful, in the final analysis, but a pure and refined Champagne of restraint and elegance. The unsweetened profile shows the "mineral" character off to best effect. | 15

**TS** | The palest wine of the flight, with classic autolytic finesse dominating the nose. Lovely lean structure; classy lean fruit tapering to a beautifully delicate, yet very distinct finish. Although I would drink now for maximum freshness, this would be interesting to keep and open up every three months. | 18

## Champagne Drappier Grande Sèndrée Rosé Brut 2006 (12% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Deep orange-hued peachy color. Evolved, winy, spicy, meaty, even leathery nose. All about wild, aged Pinot characters. Really winy on the fleshy, muscular palate, with dry, grippy finish. Powerful, deep, and expressive. A wild one, but it works. | 17.5

**AJ** | Full orange-red. Round, warm, gentle tangerine-orange fruits: stealthily attractive. Complex, composed, and secondary flavors, with lots of biscuity fullness, incipient nuttiness and modulated fruit. A pronounced earthy finish, too, with a clean finish in which the dosage is well absorbed; earthy finish. Characterful, secondary rosé Champagne that I'd enjoy drinking. | 16

**TS** | This wine's tawny pale-peach color provides an accurate reflection of the fruit on the palate, which is essentially fresh, yet has an aged element. | 15

## Nathalie Falmet Parcelle ZH 302 Extra Brut 2010 (12% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Full, soft, deep nose, with yeasty roundness and oaky sweetness.

## THIS KIND OF CLOSE-CONTACT AUTUMN FRUIT SCENTS IS ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE IN CHAMPAGNE

Weighty, intense palate, which is smooth-textured. Finishes rather short and dry. | 16  
**AJ** | Pale gold; steady mousse. Some oxygen here, and developed fruit, so oddly for an Extra Brut you have the impression of smelling some *liqueur d'expédition*. But this kind of close-contact autumn fruit scents is one of the things I love in Champagne. On the palate, this is very characterful, generous, and developed, with a good repertoire of stony flavors to match the orchard fruit; all that holds it back from a higher score is a slight clumsiness to the wine. | 15  
**TS** | Classic structure and fruit. Indeed, this has a lovely fruitiness, particularly mid-palate, spoiled only by a touch of bitterness on the finish. The bitterness appears to be from undeveloped extract, and it should open up after a year or so further aging. | 16.5



**Guiborat Les Cauré 46 Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2005** (12% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Deep lemon. Mild, soft nose of ripe fruitiness; could be more expressive. Mouth-filling, rich, even oily palate. Really rich but has enough acidity and nervousity to keep it going. Muscular and well built; still holding back a lot. | 17  
**AJ** | Full lemon-gold. A rather confused aromatic profile that doesn't really seduce. Fair on the palate, with drive, length, and purity; bright lemon and grapefruit, with a little finishing vanilla. There is plenty of ground stone here, too, and it's actually a wine I'd love to drink; if only there was a little more aromatic enchantment... | 16  
**TS** | Relatively fat compared to others, good and bad, in this tasting, and a bit heavy on the finish. Not the best in terms of finesse, but it has weight. | 15

### ANDREW JEFFORD'S VERDICT

This was a fascinating and heartening tasting. No one could claim that the results were consistent, but the best of the wines stood quite apart from the well-rounded, layered, harmonious, but relatively homogenous stylistic ideal of the region's biggest blends. These were Champagnes of individuality and difference. The big surprise for me was that so many of them were also marked by purity, length, discretion, understatement, and uncloyingness—a legacy, presumably, of the fact that more than half the wines in the tasting were either Brut Nature or Extra Brut. If I had to call differences between the categories, I would say that my preference was for the Extra Bruts; many of the Brut Nature wines seemed to be overly aromatically subdued, even if aromas could be teased from them once you got them into the mouth. The Brut wines were my least favorite grouping; somehow the sugar seems to occlude the vineyard character a bit (or perhaps this was the weakest set of vineyards).

Is there a more palpable sense of terroir in these Champagnes than in the blends of the classic houses? Yes and no. Yes, in that I honestly felt that more of these Champagnes had a sense of earthiness, of "minerality," of powdered chalk, of damp chalk, or of damp sand than a customary tasting would have revealed. Perhaps that's because so many of them were unsweetened, but one should at least allow the possibility that it is "the terroir speaking." And no, of course, because when you look at the results, you are essentially looking at the wines of the most skillful growers and producers. As in Burgundy—as everywhere—the work of the grower is the lens (or the screen) for terroir.

Overall, I really enjoyed these wines. They took me to the region with more immediacy than other Champagne tastings I have done.

### TOP WINES

David Léclapart Apôte Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2006 | 18.5

Champagne Tarlant La Vigne d'Antan Non Greffée Chardonnay Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2002 | 18.5

Jérôme Prévost La Closerie Les Béguines Extra Brut NV | 18

Roger Brun Cuvée des Sires Ay-La Pelle Grand Cru Extra Brut 2008 | 17.5

Veuve Fourny Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame Premier Cru Monopole Extra Brut 2005 | 17.5

Champagne Tarlant La Vigne d'Or Blanc de Meuniers Oeuilly Brut Nature 2004 | 17.5

Champagne Doyard Clos de l'Abbaye Premier Cru Extra Brut 2009 | 17

Laherte Frères Les 7 Extra Brut NV | 17

Marguet Les Berronts Ambonay Grand Cru Extra Brut 2010 | 17

Thiénot La Vigne aux Gamins Cuvée de 3435/1 Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 | 17



**Janisson-Baradon Conges Brut 2006** (12% ABV)

15.5

**EA** | Deep yellow with peachy hues. Nose is dominated by baked and bruised apple, with earthy depth and woody notes. Plenty of power and Pinot width. Ripe and opulent and will take time, even if today the oxidative character is too much up front. | 15

**AJ** | Deep gold; desultory mousse. Sweet, rounded, soft crème anglaise aromas. Rather rigid, harsh palate, in contrast to the aromatic profile; very driving and does have a sense of stony resource to it. Good vineyards, perhaps, but the aggression of the acidity is rather hard to climb through. Faintly bitter finish here. | 13

**TS** | This has very good concentration for the year and the barest hint of coffee-caramel; yeast-derived complexity of fruit on the palate. Fine and still evolving. | 18

**Laherte Frères La Pierre de la Justice Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV** (12% ABV)

16

**EA** | Pale lemon color. Mild, youthful pear-and-stone-fruit nose on the reductive side. Chalky minerality comes through on the lean, fresh palate. Soft mousse, and appealing, inoffensive style. Crisp, fresh finish with attractive fruitiness. | 17.5

**AJ** | Pale gold; steady mousse. Fresh, green, and sculpted aromas, with almost Rieslingesque fruit; then the palate has a green, Sauvignon-like herbaceousness to it. A little wobbly around the ideal, in other words. Nonetheless, this is a drinkable Champagne from what one assumes is a relatively modest site. | 13.5

**TS** | Clean, rich, intense, with an intense finish. | 17

**Laherte Frères Les 7 Extra Brut NV** (12.5% ABV)

16

**EA** | Pale lemon-green. Mild yellow-apple nose, spice and flowery potpourri. Crisp, acid-driven palate shadowing the fruitiness. Slightly more generous dosage could have helped; now seems disjointed. Good energy and positive vigor, though. | 14

**AJ** | Pale gold; steady mousse. Creamy sweet, soft, seaweed, and green tea for complexity; a lovely aromatic profile, and classily understated. Ivy leaf and plant sap; pristine yet articulate. Impressive, intense Champagne on the palate, too: very fine, very pure, very snowy, very stony; green apple for the fruit, but teased to such a perfection of ripeness that it sketches other ghost fruits in the



air (tangerine, firm kiwi, quince). All tautened and tightened up on the finish but without losing that allusiveness either. | 17

**TS** | We have oak, great intensity, and huge acids, which could have made something special, but it is spoiled by a touch oxidative aromas. However, it is worth opening for its massive length (without weight) and indelible aftertaste. | 17.5



## Marguet Les Bermonts Ambonay Grand Cru Extra Brut 2010 (12.5% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon color. Mild, earthy-spicy nose with leesy depth and woody notes. More pronounced palate with fine intensity. Soft and round palate, suitably dosed. | 16.5

**AJ** | Pale gold; just a lonely thread or two of gas. Attractive aromas, though: violets, jonquils, bulb leaves in spring. Fresher oak somewhere, too, but mostly sappy, moist, planty. Very concentrated and very acidic on the palate: pure, driving, and long, with ample green sap and pressed green apple. A cool place, but the overall refinement of this, despite its rather challenging profile, suggests that it's a propitious place. Brace yourselves, but well worth a look. | 17

**TS** | Oxidative aromas with oak lingering in the background. The oak-underscored fruit on the palate is the best part of this wine. Totally clean, lovely acids, but the oxidative aromas reappear on the finish. | 15

## Philipponnat Clos de Goisses Brut 2005 (13% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon with peachy tinge. Nose has depth: It is fruity, robust, and powerful. Bright Pinot fruit, a potpourri of spices, and fine toasty and charred notes alongside super-ripe fruit that is almost botrytized. Weighty, ample palate. Mouth-filling and dense but has enough freshness and life to keep it from being heavy. Still young, style-wise flirting with oxidation but staying on the safe side. Long and intense, with perfected dosage. This will take time in its firmness and power. | 19

**AJ** | Pale gold; steady mousse. Some breadly warmth; some fresh apple fruit; just a trace of spring onion/scallion. On the palate, this is a driving, firm-contoured Champagne of purity, though not much detailed finesse. It does the job in a rather charmless manner, but has character. | 13.5

**TS** | Clean, rich, yet lightly structured, this is a classic Champagne, whether single-vineyard or not. It is clean, even though it is 2005 (a rot-fest in Champagne). | 16

## Pommery Les Clos Pompadour Reims Brut Mise en Cave 2003 (magnum) (12.5% ABV) | 16

**EA** | Deep lemon color. Crisp, deep, slightly vegetal-lined nose of sweet tropical fruitiness. There are some reductive smoky characters still present. Soft and round, age-mellowed but with freshness and fluffy mousse. Long and concentrated and retaining its youthfulness very well. | 19

**AJ** | Full lemon-yellow, with a steady mousse. Onion on the nose, alas; I can't smell this with any pleasure. That reductive, sulfidic character runs through to the palate, too. | 11

**TS** | Toasty aromas dominate. The palate has a Chablisienne character, which is quite remarkable for the vintage (the only information the tasters were given). Lovely aftertaste. | 18.5

## Franck Bonville Les Belles Voyes Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut NV (12.5% ABV) | 15.5

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Subdued, stylish nose with pastry complexity and sweet, fresh red fruitiness. Oxidative; the character comes through more on the palate, which is lower on fruit than the nose. Disappointingly dull finish. | 13.5

**AJ** | Full gold with a fine seething mousse. Tiny hint of reduction, but basically this is a sweeter, creamy style with recessive fruit. On the palate, the wine is broad, full, well rounded, but with plenty of mineral ballast to keep the lemony foreground on an even keel. Attractive, if just a little simple. Good vineyard, all the same. | 15

**TS** | Smooth and intense, with a velvety-smooth mousse underneath. Long. Clean. Fresh. | 18

## Roger Brun Aÿ-La Pelle Grand Cru Extra Brut 2009 (12% ABV) | 15.5

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Nose is strong, pungent, in-your-face. More of a still, oaked Chardonnay than a Champagne. Super-strong palate, also dominated by oak. Underneath, there is sweet, vanilla-laden fruitiness in opulence. Shame the oak overpowers it. | 14

**AJ** | Mid yellow-gold, with steady mousse. Fresh, pristine apple fruit; with a little oak thickening? On the palate, a rather insistent wine; not hugely subtle, but generous and broad in the beam. Good-quality fruit nonetheless, and there is much to enjoy here. | 15.5

**TS** | Cedary oak is quite dominant, and the terpene-like fruit would make me think of 2008, if the acids were higher. Not that the acids are low: They are just right. A very distinctive Champagne that could have been all the greater if not for the oxidative hint. Very good nonetheless. | 17.5

## Drappier Grande Sèndrée Brut 2002 (12% ABV) | 15.5

**EA** | Deep golden, peach-hued color. Strong, appley nose with great intensity but also oxidative notes. Really mouth-filling and concentrated. Age-

mellowed and ripe but starting to lose some of its energy and move to a more melancholic genre. Great acidity backing it up, though. | 16

**AJ** | Old gold; gently sustained mousse. Well-composed aromas: fresh apple, a sweet brocade of spun sugar around it, some earthy fullness; dewy grass. Not quite classic, but diverting and engaging. Full, rich, and rounded on the palate, with plenty of oxygen softening and cellar charm. Characterful, relatively sweet-edged, older Champagne from good-quality vineyards, but it's time to tip it back... | 14.5

**TS** | Broad-brush flavors underscored by a very soft and sumptuous mousse. | 16

## Nathalie Falmet Le Val Cornet Brut 2010 (12% ABV) | 15.5

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Soft, sweet nose; rather mild. The flavors come through more on the palate: pungent floral tones. Fresh and fruity, but could use more finesse and complexity. | 15

**AJ** | Full lemon-gold with a steady mousse. Complex aromas in which grapefruit and apple mingle with some sappy freshness. Concentrated, intense, vinous, and long flavors, with what is surely a low level of dosage for Brut. Lively and perfumed at the finish, and some stoniness too. Very good: multilayered and rewarding Champagne with a real sense of personality to it. | 16.5

**TS** | Fine and smooth, with a lively mousse of small bubbles. | 15



## Benoit Lahaye Le Jardin de la Grosse Pierre Grand Cru Sans Dosage: Nature 2010 (12% ABV) | 15.5

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Soft, ripe red-apple nose, baking spices, ginger and floral tones. Expansive, fluffy mousse on the wide but loose palate. Bitingly acidic at the end. Can't help but crave a mild dosage. Clean fruitiness and good vibrancy. | 15

**AJ** | Pale gold; desultory mousse. Scents of damp chalk and apple peel. Searching and very appley on the palate, but good finesse here, and more damp chalk on the finish. This tastes like Champagne looks in winter: interestingly mournful. Good single-vineyard Champagne. Totally dry, yet there is the whisper of sweetness

and perfume right at the end. Vinous and resonant. I'd love to drink some of this. In the context of its peers, admirably stony. | **16.5**  
**TS** | A touch oxidative on the nose, lots of acid, a bit citric. A nice touch of subtle oak mid-palate, but lacks fruit or yeast-complexed amplexness, which would take this wine further. Drink; do not keep. | **15**



**Georges Laval Les Chênes Cumières Premier Cru Brut Nature 2009** (12.5% ABV) | **15.5**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Mild, elegant, beautifully creamy nose; lovely vanilla and toast depth from bottle aging. Promising. Intense and round on the palate, too, but finishes unnecessarily dry, which deducts from the charm. Still, good depth and character of its own without losing its elegance. | **16.5**  
**AJ** | Mid-gold; gentle mousse. Sweet but a little cloying; hint of warm plastic. On the palate, though, a better wine than the nose suggested: pure, dry, stony, refined, long; almost nutty but not quite; almost stony but not quite. A more attractive aroma would win a higher score. | **14.5**  
**TS** | A leesy character to the nose, this wine has an interesting balance of richness for its lean structure. Could be kept a short while. | **16**

**David Léclapart Apôtre Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2006** (12.5% ABV) | **15.5**

**EA** | Deep golden. Ripe, deep nose of fresh fruit, spices and honey. Intense, well-built, firm, and strong palate that still has freshness. Fine up until the very finish: The aftertaste is pungent, mousy, and unpleasantly drying. Woody characters are lingering. The aroma development in the glass is not positive. | **13**  
**AJ** | Mid-depth of gold; steady and fine-beaded. Fresh, flowery, and light: very attractive scents. Faint, seaweedy, umami-like warmth behind, though there is also a slight cardboard note, which is less impressive. On the palate, this is a rich, chewy, super-mineral style, like drinking liquidized chalk sticks in a... well, not apple purée, because the apple fruit has been wonderfully transmogrified and rendered vinous, so mixed into a fine northern wine purée. This isn't in any way classic; it doesn't have a huge amount of nervy finesse; but if you're interested in the way that wine can taste

of stone and soil, it's absolutely on the button. Big and "mineral"—the place just lifted up, rendered liquid, and lowered down on your tongue. | **18.5**

**TS** | Quite intense, but lacks finesse. | **14.5**

**Michel Lorient Monodié en Meunier Majeur Les Virtuoses Vieilles Vignes Extra Brut 2007** (12% ABV) | **15.5**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Sweet, almost overripe nose with lifted, varnish tones. Pungent, concentrated palate. There is power, but at the expense of finesse. | **13**

**AJ** | Full gold; steady mousse. Full, sweet, maternal, nourishing Champagne scents, but lacks precision. Similar on the palate: long, full, generous, but the contours are a little looser than in the best of its peers. Good-quality fruit makes it a thoroughly enjoyable Champagne nonetheless. | **15**

**TS** | Remarkably clean and concentrated fruit, supported by deliriously high acids and a fabulously soft, creamy, and silky mousse. | **18.5**

**Billecart-Salmon Le Clos St Hilaire Brut 1999** (12.5% ABV) | **15**

**EA** | Deep peach-hued color approaching rose. Full, ripe soft nose of mature Pinot fruit. Not completely clean fruitiness, and it is starting to tire. There is plenty of character, but it's lacking elegance and harmony. | **16**

**AJ** | Old gold now, but the mousse is sustained. Attractive: nutty and mushroomy. Tangy, gracious, and full on the palate, but probably on a gentle decline: I don't get much sense of nerve or inner freshness, and the aromatic palate profile is a little smudgy. | **13.5**

**TS** | Old-gold color with a marmalade hue, suggesting age. | **15**



**Coessens Lieu-Dit Lagillier Blanc de Noirs Brut NV** (12% ABV) | **15**

**EA** | Pale lemon. Mild, even mute white fruit nose. Fresh and fruity but somehow not together. Withdrawn but, on a positive note, does not show oxidation. | **14**

**AJ** | Pale lemon-gold but indolent mousse.

Powder-puff nose, then a surprisingly aggressive palate. The overall effect is slightly jangling. Drinkable, but more a one-glass Champagne than a whole-bottle version. | **12.5**

**TS** | Wow, this is the first, truly complex (high-acid, chocolaty), clean-styled, non-oxidative Champagne! | **18**

**Charles Dufour LR.11 0.83.44 Blanc de Blancs La Chevêtrée Brut Nature NV** (12.5% ABV) | **15**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Soft, ripe apple nose, red-fruit, spices and apple-pie tones. Some complexity on the nose. Full-bodied, mouth-filling, soft palate. It has got some charm and does not feel too dry for a Brut Nature. Still, rather singular. | **15.5**

**AJ** | Full gold; energetic mousse. Warm, rich, well-rounded aromas of orchards in autumn: ripe fruit, and a few windfalls in the deep grass. Vivid, round, soft fruit; very well balanced considering that we are among the unsweetened wines, so presumably a nice warm site. Sound and satisfying, though without much focus or precision. | **14**

**TS** | Very much a fruit-forward style, with slightly VA-lifted pineapple fruit dominating and touch acetic on the finish. Not at all special, but I like this more than my frank appraisal sounds. Drink; do not keep. | **15**

**Philipponnat Mareuil-sur-Ay Extra Brut 2006** (12% ABV) | **15**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon with peachy hues. Mild, soft, unexpressive nose. Peach and floral tones. Very dry, calm palate that could use some vivacity. Pungent, dry finish. | **14**

**AJ** | Mid old gold, with a steady discreet mousse. Rather heavy, sullen aromas; doesn't quite lift off into freshness. Concentrated, though; evidently high-quality fruit taken to generous levels of ripeness, making for an almost chewily rich Extra Brut, long and structured, full of ripe orchard fruit,

**SOFT, RIPE APPLE NOSE, RED-FRUIT, SPICES AND APPLE-PIE TONES. SOME COMPLEXITY ON THE NOSE. FULL-BODIED, MOUTH-FILLING, SOFT PALATE. IT HAS GOT SOME CHARM AND DOES NOT FEEL TOO DRY FOR A BRUT NATURE. STILL, RATHER SINGULAR**



and qualified by a dose of mineral salts and a shake of stone. Excellent on the palate; with more finely crafted aromas, this would have won a very high score. | 16

**TS** | Very fresh, with a soft and silky mousse. | 14.5

## Champagne Tarlant La Vigne Royale Principauté de Condé Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2003 | 15

**EA** | Deep peach-tinged golden color. Soft, deep, oxidative nose. Spicy apple character. Concentrated and weighty; there is a lot on the palate. Great acidity, but the oxidation masks much of its complexity. | 15

**AJ** | Old gold with a steady mousse. Very full and developed, but attractive... like hovering your nose over a big tray of crystallized fruits and inhaling deeply. Oxygen-freighted but works well. On the palate, the wine is rich, deep, structured, and vinous. Not hugely detailed and not sharp-focused, but hey! Pour a glass and lean back into the sofa, and you'll find a huge amount to enjoy. And isn't that really what you'd want if you bought a 2003? Lovely vinosity here—almost the definition of the word. Structured fruit, heavy on the bough. | 16.5

**TS** | By no means undrinkable, but too aldehydic. Lacks focus and finesse. | 14



## Champagne Tarlant Cuvée Louis Extra Brut NV (12% ABV) | 15

**EA** | Deep lemon-gold. Aged nose with bruised apple notes, singular with spicity punch tones. Too much on the oxidative side and very, very dry. Crisp, but with withering fruitiness. | 13

**AJ** | Mid-gold, with an impressively sprightly, fine-beaded mousse. Drily restrained aromas. Not unfriendly, but without a lot of expressive force; perhaps that will come with time. Sappy, fresh, vanilla, clean, and sound; bread, vanilla,

lemon right to the finish. Vinous, pure, and tapered, too. This Champagne works very well, and I have the feeling it would get better still as one demolished the bottle. | 15.5

**TS** | On initial nosing of the flight, this had such a maderized nose that I asked for a second bottle, but alas, there was none. However, by the time I got to the end of the flight, much of the maderized character had dissipated and, though still present, the rest of the wine was enjoyable, particularly the balance between its yeast-complexed amplexness and lean structure. Oh, and the aftertaste, which went on and on. | 17

## Veuve Fourny Les Rougesmonts Premier Cru Rosé Extra Brut NV | 14.5

**EA** | Medium-deep cherry hued rose. Ample, fruity nose but of attractively sweet, stylish fruitiness; a strawberry and raspberry lemonade character. Crisp, lacy, succulent palate. Not very complex, but the sweet, clean fruitiness has appeal. Unconventional, but works. | 16

**AJ** | Pale cherry red, with a little dissolved orange just waiting to emerge. Somewhat gruff, appley and raw on the aromas. Relatively simple fruit on the palate. Characterful but low-finesse for its region. | 13.5

**TS** | A distinct, true peach colour of some, but not too much, depth. Spoiled by some oxidative aromas at the back of the throat. | 14

## Janisson-Baradon Toulettes Brut 2006 (12% ABV) | 14.5

**EA** | Deep golden. Oak-lined, sweet exuberant nose. Plenty of fruit and high quality oak, but it overpowers. Full and structured, fresh palate. For an oaky style this is well made, but still too much. | 16

**AJ** | Full lemon-yellow. Sweet and custardy, though not hugely subtle. Rather edgy, sharp palate. Sense of damp chalk, but the slightly raw fruit doesn't carry those flavors with much charm, alas. Acidulous rather than vinous and perfumed finish. | 12

**TS** | Cedary fruit, with high acids, exceptional length and a clean finish. | 15

## Georges Laval Les Hautes Chèvres Cumières Premier Cru Brut Nature 2009 (12.5% ABV) | 14.5

**EA** | Pale color, with a peachy hue. Toffee on the mild nose of red-fruit profile. Big mousse on the palate, which finishes extremely dry. Crisp, invigorating, and pleasantly intense style, clearly aiming for transparency, but could use some charm and complexity. | 14.5

**AJ** | Pale; languid mousse. Sweet, enticing crème anglaise scents, with a little seaweed behind. Rather straightforward on the palate, by contrast: dry, open, sound, but uneventful. | 13.5

**TS** | A touch smoky, with oxidative edges on the nose. Not uninteresting, but the most interesting aspect of this is the sappy, mouthwatering finish. Drink; do not keep. | 15

## Cédric Boucharde Roses de Jeanne Côte de Val Vilaine Brut NV (12.5% ABV) | 14

**EA** | Peach-hued medium-deep color. Lifted, oak-toned, overwhelmingly powerful nose. Sweet impression. Overoaked. Intense palate; would be great to see how it is underneath the sweet, oaky coating. | 13

**AJ** | Mid- to old gold; steady mousse. This one is a little bit obvious on the nose, with a little bit of DMS [dimethyl sulfide], which I find a turnoff. Coarse, careless nose. Rather acidulous and then dosage-balanced on the palate. | 10

**TS** | Lovely, clean, fresh, lemony-toasty, yeast-complexed aromas, with intense, super-clean, yeast-complexed fruit on the palate. | 18.5

## Cattier Clos du Moulin Premier Cru Brut NV (12.5% ABV) | 14

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Round, fruit-forward red-berry nose, with flowery perfume. Rather simple, but clean and bright. Zesty and energetic palate. | 14.5

**AJ** | Mid-gold. Gentle, soft, uneventful aromas of vaguely sweet style. Simple, fresh, lively, sherbetty Champagne. Tastes concentrated, but most of this concentration is attributable to the rather biting acid profile. | 12.5

**TS** | First bottle corked; second clean. Good but not special. Absolutely fine-drinking Champagne, but not offering anything site-specific. | 15.5



## Roger Coulon Héritage Brut NV (12% ABV) | 14

**EA** | Deep golden color. Evolved, sweet nose with undertones of vanilla, honey, and pastry. Big and bold entry, but it becomes hollow and loses its linearity. Coarse mousse. Somehow disjointed. Very dry and austere at the finish. | 14.5

**AJ** | Mid-gold with steady mousse. Plump, sweet nose; you can almost smell the dosage. Concentrated but rather raw wine; sweetened apple cores. I wouldn't drink this with much pleasure, alas. | 12

**TS** | Flinty, wet-pebble style, with an energetic mousse and a grippy finish. Not classic, but not bad either! | 15


**Dehours Maisoncelle  
Extra Brut 2006** (12% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Deep peach-hued colour. Sweet, oaky, smoky and charred nose, with oxidative notes that mask the fruitiness. Calm, even dull, and could use more life and freshness. | **13.5**

**AJ** | Golden butterscotch now. Very unctuous: peach and balsam. Rich, chewy, and full, but it lacks a little vitality and nerve. I don't know if it came into being on a hill, but it seems to be going over the top. | **12.5**

**TS** | Deep gold, perhaps even rose-gold, with an intense, oaky aroma. Maintains an attractive light balance through to the finish. | **16**

**Charles Dufour Blanc de Blancs  
Chardonnay Avalon Brut Nature  
NV** (12.5% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Mild, autumnal, apple nose. Bright fruit, but straightforward in character. Strong palate with the same simple fruit profile, all about bruised red apples. Cruelly dry finish; dries out the palate. No charm here. | **12.5**

**AJ** | Light to medium gold, with a steady, fine mousse. Softly earthy, planty aromas: unusual, attractive, and off the well-trodden big-brand path. Deep, dry, searching, stony; resonantly austere, thanks to super-restrained fruit. More plant sap and earth in the finish. This is the sort of thing that a single-vineyard approach ought to bring, and it expands the Champagne horizons. You can't say it's a great Champagne, but it is unquestionably a successful Champagne de terroir, and I'd enjoy a thoughtful glass or two. | **14.5**

**TS** | Aldehydic-oxidative aromas dominate on first approach, slightly VA-lifted pineapple fruit on the palate, supported by a refreshing mousse of very fine bubbles. Drink; do not keep. | **15**

**Egly-Ouriet Blanc de Noirs  
Les Crayères Grand Cru Brut NV** (12.5% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Deep color with browning hues. Main character is regrettably oxidation, meaning that you cannot appreciate anything underneath. | **10**

**AJ** | Very developed old gold. Rich and autumnal and avuncular to smell, with a breadiness behind.

You'd expect this to be an older vintage rather than an NV, but perhaps it is solera work or a grower style. Either way, I like it a lot, and that oxygen/wine relationship draws me into the glass. On the palate, this is deep, pure, long, expressive, and subtle, despite—or thanks to—the oxidative style; the allusions are rewardingly autumnal (leaf mold, ripe apples with waxy skins, quince jelly). I don't get a lot of stone from the palate, but the technically assured mousse and ripe acid structure carry the wine well. | **16.5**

**TS** | Correct structure and long, lean, intense finish, but oaky-aldehydic. | **15**

**Champagne Pierre Gerbais  
L'Audace 100% Pinot Noir  
Brut Nature NV** (12% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon with a peach hue. Mild, red-apple, rather straightforward nose, which is somewhat reminiscent of cider. Pear and yeast characters. Round palate; mousse a bit foamy. Slightly hollow, lacking grip. Very dry, but has sweet fruitiness. Simple and youthful. | **14**

**AJ** | Full gold; slightly lazy mousse. Rich, toasty nose, teetering into butterscotchy fatness and a slight flatness: big flirtation with oxygen. Deep, apple fruit... from Meunier country? I quite like the orchard frankness of this wine, but I can't say it's a Champagne of great finesse, and some might find it frankly cidery. It is balanced, though, for a non-dosage wine. | **12.5**

**TS** | Fresh, vibrant nose, with some floral-autolytic aromas translating to the palate. Medium weight, good mousse, clean finish initially, but a bit of sour cream on the aftertaste. Drink; do not keep. | **15**

**Janisson-Baradon Tue Boeuf  
Brut 2006** (12% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon-gold. Deep autumnal nose of red apple and pastry; on the oxidative side. Fine acidity and intensity, but the oxidation overpowers the fruit. Winery and mouth-filling. | **14.5**

**AJ** | Full gold with a steady mousse. Round, sweet, warm: mallow and balm. Deep, dry, taut; a little unyielding and cardboardy on the palate; very much a contrast to the unfocused sweetness of the aromas. | **12.5**

**TS** | Has intensity and one direction, but not elegance or finesse. | **15**

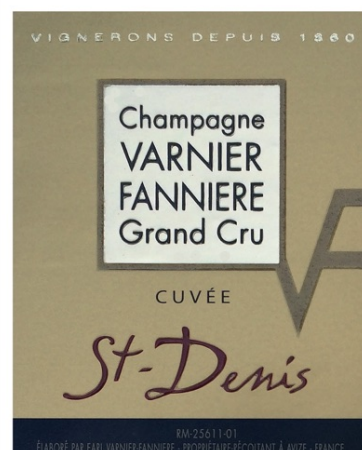
**Varnier Fannièrre Cuvée St-Denis  
Grand Cru Brut NV** (12% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Clean, crisp fruitiness, youthful, floral and apple character. Attractive vanilla-coated red fruit. Fresh and vibrant, even a touch playful. The mousse is a bit coarse, but the fruitiness is pleasant. The wine is easy to approach, yet it comes with character. | **15.5**

**AJ** | Bright green-gold; steady mousse. Very sappy and green; almost Sauvignon-esque. Cool place or prompt pick? Hmm... Rather simple stuff here; pleasant quaffing Champagne for Sauvignon lovers, but it lacks challenge and nobility for me. Well, perhaps I am being unfair; there is a finishing stoniness to lend a little seriousness to the fruit,

and that markedly green, almost herbaceous character might be a vineyard trait. | **13**

**TS** | Very fresh and ultra-fruity, but this is rather simple. | **14**


**Champagne Dumangin  
Premium Single Vineyard  
Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut  
2006 (CB)** (12% ABV) **14**

**EA** | Pale lemon. Really crisp nose without any oxidative notes. Clean white-fruit and floral profile. Youthful with some leanness and subtle, yogurt lactic notes. Restrained palate, too, focused and tight. Fresh and lean with long, clean, very dry length. Serious style, not playing on charm, but well made with further improvement potential. | **16.5**

**AJ** | Pale green-gold; steady mousse. An almost flinty nose: struck stone and not damp chalk—that is, some reduction or even sulfide drift; not quite aromatically impeccable. Green apple beneath. Vivid, edgy, incisive; the same combination of stone and green apple. Slightly aggressive and raw in style, but concentrated and long. | **11.5**

**TS** | Only one bottle, and it has a very slight murky aroma, which could be the beginning of DMDS [dimethyl disulfide], but no second bottle to taste against. Mid-palate okay, but the mousse seems disjointed, capable of dissipating, and I still have the possibility of DMDS at the back of my mind. Prefer to give no score. | **NS**

**Ulysse Collin Les Maillons Blanc  
de Noirs Extra Brut NV** (13% ABV) **13.5**

**EA** | Deep orange-hued, worrying color. Dull, oxidative, cider-like apple nose. Waxy. Wide, mouth-filling palate, very intense but oxidation masks most nuances. Too dry, too. | **10**

**AJ** | An almost alarmingly deep gold here, with very languid mousse; it may be NV, but it doesn't look like a youngster. Rather soupy, oxidized nose; maybe a solera-style Champagne, I guess—but if so, the nose doesn't really make the case for the technique. On the palate, by contrast, I find this an interesting and rewarding Champagne: deep, long,



round, resonant, with very complex fruit flavors and a nutty cast, but at the same time, fresh, pure, vigorous, sappy, concentrated, and long. Rather difficult to mark, but I'll go with my palate enthusiasm... | 15.5

**TS** | Gold color, not old or oxidizing (acetic) on the nose but spoiled by an aldehydic-oxidative (acetaldehyde) dimension. Good balance of fruit and acidity, but I am left wondering why it is so golden. If the reason is because of age, or aged reserves, then there should be more complexity. Puzzling, though that's not intrinsically a bad thing. | 15

**Demarne-Frison Lalore**  
**Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature NV** | 13.5  
(12.5% ABV)

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Nose is slightly lifted; strong, oak-lined, and spicy. Vanilla and baked apple. Full-bodied, beautifully intense and driven. Fine acid line and long length. Great structure, but the oak and oxidation are too prominent. Has capacity to age. Ambitious, but some finesse is masked by the oak. | 15.5

**AJ** | Pale to mid-gold; steady mousse. Apple, pear, and tangerine scents: frank, firm, a little flat. A rather raw, acrid palate, alas, without any of the diagnostic Champagne finesse; apple-core finish. | 11.5

**TS** | Distinctly oaky aromas, aldehydic-oxidative aromas build in mouth and develop through to finish. Good energetic mousse. Just too oaky. Fine for lovers of 4x2, but chunky and lacks balance. Drink; do not keep. | 14



**Laherte Frères Les Beaudiers**  
**Rosé de Saignée Vieilles Vignes de Pinot Meunier Extra Brut NV (CB)** | 13.5  
(12% ABV)

**EA** | Deep cherry-hued rosé color. Very strong nose, all about red berries and tutti-frutti. Too extracted to show Champagne rosé typicity. Approaching Beaujolais. Clean and crisp, though. | 10

**AJ** | Quite a deep rosé color here; translucent cherry red. Very Pinot-esque, like sniffing a village Chambolle from high up on the hill. Great! And that is absolutely what the palate gives you, too; this is brimming with fresh yet developed Pinot fruit and presumably summarizes a generous Champagne Pinotplace. It might not do for the purists, but I'd enjoy it a lot. | 16

**TS** | The color of this rose is verging on *clairet* with a hint of brick brown. The nose is dominated by

milk-powder malolactic, which I suspect comes from the red wine, if indeed that is how it was made. | 14.5



**Philipponnat Le Léon Aÿ Grand Cru Extra Brut 2006** | 13.5  
(12% ABV)

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon with blushing hues. Sweaty nose of floral and waxy characters. Unappetizing. Full, weighty, calm, winey palate missing energy. | 12

**AJ** | Pale old gold with a steady, fine mousse. This aroma won't please the purists much, but I rather like its white-Hermitage-like mayflower and hawthorn, and its summer straw. Very similar on the palate: This is what all St-Peray would be if it could. By which I mean no insult: a lovely, articulate, ripe, full, aromatically allusive Champagne that suggests not the orchard but the wildflower meadow and the mountain upland. I'd love to drink this. | 16.5

**TS** | I'm probably going to be the odd one out on this, because I find it very undefined, with a "furry" aftertaste that clings to the back of my throat. | 12

**Charles Dufour LR.10 0.32.30**  
**Blanc de Blancs Pinot Blanc**  
**Le Champ du Clos Brut Nature NV** | 13  
(12.5% ABV)

**EA** | Pale lemon-green. Mild, youthful nose of white fruit and confectionary. Not Champagne-

**I RATHER LIKE ITS WHITE-HERMITAGE-LIKE MAYFLOWER AND HAWTHORN, AND ITS SUMMER STRAW. VERY SIMILAR ON THE PALATE: THIS IS WHAT ALL ST-PERAY WOULD BE IF IT COULD. A LOVELY, ARTICULATE, RIPE, FULL, AROMATICALLY ALLUSIVE CHAMPAGNE**

like on the palate. Hollow, pungent palate, with unclear whiffs. Unpleasant finish. | 11

**AJ** | Pale gold; steady mousse. Aromatically quiet, faintly seaweedy; very lean palate, with green fruits and a little more seaweed and samphire for complexity, but also a slightly cardboardy note, too. "Mineral," faintly saline finish. Not an unqualified success, but an interesting Champagne all the same, and I'd like to know where it came from. | 13.5

**TS** | Plenty of fruit backed up by excellent acidity, with fine floral fruit tapering toward the finish, spoiled only by an oxidative touch. Drink; do not keep. | 15

**Gonet-Médeville Le Mesnil-sur-Oger Grand Cru Champ d'Alouette Extra Brut 2002** | 12  
(13% ABV)

**EA** | Deep golden. Really sweet, calm, deep nose, the first bottle was not completely clean. Wax and tea leaves on top of sweet fruit. Oily and flat. Could use more life. | 14.5

**AJ** | Deep gold; steady mousse but very big bubbles. A little soupy sweet and superficial; whiff of cream soda. Tangy, full, vivid, and the age has brought a roundness and depth to the wine; very sound and rewarding to drink. But the aromatic profile is not as finely crafted as it might be, or the vineyard hasn't quite made its aromatic case. | 14

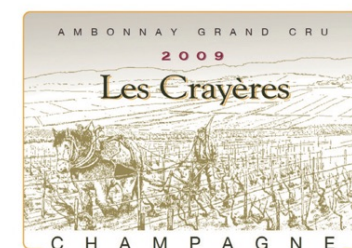
**TS** | First bottle corked; second clean, and though the second seemed cleaner at first, it was much colder and soon developed the "seemingly" corked aroma. | 7.5

**Marguet Les Crayères**  
**Ambonnay Grand Cru Extra Brut 2009** | 12  
(12.5% ABV)

**EA** | Medium-deep lemon. Pungently yeasty, flor-reminiscent nose. The yeasty, oxidative character has taken over. Too dry and austere on the palate. | 11

**AJ** | Pale gold; fine, snowy mousse. Scents of pear cordial or cider made with eating apples and not cider apples: striking, enjoyable, but not subtle. Palate idem. Not a huge success, frankly. | 11.5

**TS** | Very smooth in the mouth, but spoiled by aldehydic aromas. | 13.5



*The following wines arrived too late for the main tasting but were tasted, open, by Tom Stevenson and/or Andrew Jefford, shortly afterward:*

## ESSI AVELLAN'S VERDICT

There are different philosophies for producing single-vineyard Champagne. Many of the larger houses apply their regular winemaking scheme to the single-vineyard Champagnes, and the result sometimes speaks louder of the house style than its origins. This I noted to be the case with both Krug Clos du Mesnil and Pommery Les Clos Pompadour, albeit fantastic Champagnes both. Similarly, Taittinger Les Folies de la Marquetterie stood out as a more conventional, pristinely crafted and perfectly balanced style. At the other end of the philosophical spectrum are the purists with their organic or biodynamic, low-sulfur and low- or no-dosage policies aiming for maximum authenticity and transparency.

Even if as natural as possible makes perfect sense on paper, the end result did not always work out to the wine's benefit. All too many of such wines were plain oxidized in this tasting, and I found oxidation to greatly mask the terroir, the very thing the producer was trying to express. Small batch size and low sulfur is indeed a challenging combination. Additionally, many of the makers had chosen to use oak heavily-handedly, further muting the wine's terroir expression. All in all, it seemed that the wines were seeking extra complexity from oak to compensate for the single origin. Admittedly, single-vineyard often means a certain singularity or straightforwardness in the Champagne. However, this could be combated by practicing blending even within a single vineyard, a great example of such being Philipponnat with its Clos des Goisses. I am critical of the often hefty prices of the single-vineyard Champagnes compared to the rest of the producer's range (one great-value exception being Taittinger Les Folies de la Marquetterie). All too often, one is paying more for a simpler wine.

The top scorers were truly fine Champagnes: I gave 19 points to four Champagnes and 18 or 18.5 to four more. The wines in my top eight were hugely versatile in their style and character, including everything

from Pinot Noir-dominant blends, to pure Chardonnays, and even a 100 percent Meunier. One rosé, the charming Clos des Goisses Juste Rosé, made it to my top eight, which included both stainless-steel-vinified wines and oak-fermented wines. The origins ranged from classic grands crus of Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Sillery, to less common crus such as Reims or Gueux. This diversity, no doubt, is the gist of the single-vineyard Champagne phenomenon.

Many of the classics showed beautifully in this tasting. Clos des Goisses 2005 was grand in its amplitude and generosity, and there was enchanting power and vibrancy in Krug's Clos du Mesnil 2003. The Pommery Les Clos Pompadour NV was beautifully elegant in a reductive style, to which the magnum format no doubt contributed. On the grower Champagne front, I was blown away by François Secondé's 2008 from Sillery. Pristinely clean, invigorating, and coming with a beautiful, stony-mineral expression. A long-time favorite, Jérôme Prévost La Closerie Les Béguines Pinot Meunier was in great form, and I was also impressed by Veuve Fourny's 2005 Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame's soulful character.

To conclude, only the best plots are able to mirror enough character, and only the best winemakers are able to deal with the challenges of small-batch vinification. I cannot say I was disappointed with the tasting—it was more or less what I was expecting. Still, I cannot help but think that putting one's best plots in single-vineyard cuvées (many growers make several) may, in the end, detract from, rather than increase, the overall quality of a small grower-producer's offering. Thus, even if I am supportive of the phenomenon, I hope that not too many more producers will jump on this bandwagon for the sake of the concept, but only for the sake of quality when there is something to gain and a truly interesting terroir to reflect. Copying the Burgundy model will not benefit Champagne quality, since blending is greatly needed to build complexity, harmony, and vivacity in most of the wines.

## TOP WINES

Krug Clos du Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut 2003 **19**

Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut 2005 **19**

Pommery Les Clos Pompadour Reims Brut (magnum) Mise en Cave 2003 **19**

François Secondé À Sillery Grand Cru Brut 2008 **19**

Taittinger Les Folies de la Marquetterie Brut NV **18.5**

Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Juste Rosé Brut 2005 **18**

Jérôme Prévost La Closerie Les Béguines Extra Brut NV **18**

Veuve Fourny Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame Premier Cru Monopole Extra Brut 2005 **18**

Cattier Clos du Moulin Premier Cru Rosé Brut NV **17.5**

Champagne Drappier Grande Sèdrée Rosé Brut 2006 **17.5**

Champagne Pierre Gerbais Celles-sur-Ource Réserve 100% Côtes des Bar Extra Brut NV **17.5**

Laherte Frères La Pierre de la Justice Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV **17.5**

Thiénot La Vigne aux Gamins Cuvée de 3435/1 Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 **17.5**

### Champagne Pierre Paillard Bouzy Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Acte 1 Les Mottelettes 2009 (12.5% ABV)

**TS** | Some aldehydic aromas, which mix with perceptible alcohol on the finish, but the mousse is nicely formed, and the palate has surprisingly steely fruit for a Bouzy Chardonnay. Seems to be relatively recently disgorged, with promise of more to come. **| 15**



### Champagne Pierre Paillard Bouzy Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut Acte 1 Les Maillequettes 2009 (12.5% ABV)

**TS** | Also a touch aldehydic, but richer, softer, and more together on the palate. This blanc de noirs clearly shows why Bouzy built its grand cru reputation on the Pinot Noir grape. **| 16**

### Champagne Penet-Chardonnet Les Epinettes Grand Cru Extra Brut 2009 (12% ABV)

**AJ** | A lively mousse, with powdery, lemony, ivy-leaf scents and lots of finesse. On the palate, the wine is fine-grained, elegant, and acidic, with austere, driving lemon and green-apple fruit. It finishes very tautly and tightly, despite the six years of age. Will it relax into articulation with further aging? Perhaps—but there's little sign of this yet. **| 14.5**

**TS** | This has an extra dimension of freshness and purity of fruit, helped no doubt by its acidity, which, if tasted blind, I might put down as a classic 2008 rather than a more lush 2009. This acid line is particularly effective across a range of dishes at the table. **| 17**



Both bottles of the following wine were corked:

■ **Champagne Penet-Chardonnet Les Fervins Grand Cru Extra Brut 2009** ■