

CHAMPAGNE EXPLORING THE MAGNUM EFFECT

We now understand far more of the theory as to why magnums of the “same Champagne” should be so much better than bottles. A special tasting, introduced by **Tom Stevenson** and shared with **Essi Avellan MW** and **Simon Field MW**, afforded incontrovertible and irresistible proof in the glass

The object of this tasting was to test the so-called magnum effect. Sometimes we level the playing field by requesting the same vintage and disgorgement date, but for this tasting we wanted to examine the magnum effect on different vintages (and Non-Vintage blends) over varying periods of disgorgement. The only two factors that were inviolate were that the Champagne for each pair of bottle and magnum had to be exactly the same, and they both had to have been disgorged within about one month of each other. How long they had been disgorged was not so much inconsequential as intrinsic to the testing of varying periods of disgorgement.

What is the magnum effect?

At its most basic, the magnum effect infers something so intrinsically superior about magnums that they will always taste significantly better. The commonly accepted reasoning behind this phenomenon has always been that the smaller ratio of oxygen to wine in magnums causes the same wine to age more slowly and more gracefully. This is indeed true. But when it comes to sparkling wine, there is more to it than that.

Sometime in the 1990s (I forget exactly when), I was enjoying a one-to-one tasting of bottles and magnums of Croser sparkling wine at the Bridgewater Mill in the Adelaide Hills with the great man himself, when he asked me whether I thought the magnum effect occurred before

disgorgement, as well as after. He did not seem to think so, but it was an intriguing question and one that I would eventually pick up and run with.

Even before Brian Croser had planted that line of inquiry in my mind, it was evident that although large-bottle formats of red wine are favored by collectors, the magnum effect is more noticeable in sparkling wine than it is in any still wine, whether it is red or white. Furthermore, although Jéroboams of sparkling wine are clearly superior to regular 75cl bottles, the jump in quality from magnum to Jéroboam is far less than it is from the 75cl bottle to magnum. Typically, magnums are smoother, have more finesse, and quite often can be devoid of any oxidative character, even when the 75cl bottles of the same wine are highly aldehydic.

So, what is it specifically about magnums and sparkling wine?

After it has its closure, a sparkling wine produced by the traditional method is in a highly reductive state, unlike a still wine. At the time of disgorgement (which is to say just before final corking), all the oxygen in a bottle-fermented sparkling wine has been scavenged by the yeast, whereas there will be dissolved oxygen in the Bordeaux, or whatever the still wine happens to be. The neck and the diameter of the opening for a 75cl bottle is exactly the same as it is for a 150cl magnum (whereas they are much bigger for a Jéroboam), thus the headspace in both will contain the same volume of oxygen, just as the future rate

of oxygen ingress will also be roughly the same. For those who find the notion of oxygen entering a sparkling wine against a pressure of some six atmospheres counterintuitive, please be assured that it is true (see Boyle's law, partial pressures, and so on). Since a magnum has double the ratio of wine to oxygen, both in situ and in the future by ingress, its potential for oxidation will be approximately half that of a 75cl bottle. This is the magnum effect explanation in a nutshell. Or used to be, until Brian Croser raised the issue of whether it exists before disgorgement, as well as after...

Altered biochemical pathways

As it turns out, the magnum effect does exist before disgorgement. In fact, the magnum effect starts before the second fermentation. In the graph on the following spread, we can see a radical difference in the progress of the second fermentation of exactly the same wine in both 75cl bottles (red) and magnums (green). The second fermentation in a regular 75cl bottle is relatively smooth and straightforward, with just a little dip toward the end, when the yeasts, which are voracious consumers of oxygen, have to scavenge the wine for sufficient oxygen to maintain their numbers and complete the fermentation. By comparison, the yeasts in a magnum have twice as much wine to ferment, yet virtually the same volume of oxygen with which to sustain their health, metabolism, and thus numbers. (The difference in dissolved oxygen is

inconsequential compared to the oxygen in the headspace.) As the green line shows, this relative shortage of oxygen causes the fermentation to start two or three days later (because it takes longer for the yeast to build up a viable population of active yeast cells) and continues to be problematic for the yeasts, which seem to “gasp for air” throughout the entire second fermentation, not just at the end; consequently, the whole process takes approximately eight days longer to complete. It should be stressed that the difficulties faced by yeasts in a magnum are not insurmountable and are not even serious, despite the restricted oxygen reserves. They are merely hurdles that the yeasts can overcome if they work a little harder and a little longer. However, because the yeasts have to work harder and longer, some of the biochemical pathways in a magnum fermentation are altered, effectively producing an altered sparkling wine from exactly the same base wine in a 75cl bottle. So, magnums of sparkling wine are not only fresher and smoother, with much more finesse than the “same wine” in 75cl bottles, they are also different.

Results and conclusions

We tasted the wines in pairs, randomly mixed (sometimes the bottle first, other times the magnum, and never knowing which way around they were). We knew the vintage or whether it was a Non-Vintage, so that we could make a valid assessment, but not the name of the

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AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	15	12-19
EA	17	14-19
SF	15.5	13.5-18
TS	16	12-18.5

TOM STEVENSON'S TOP WINES

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2000 Magnum **18.5**

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002 Magnum **18.5**

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 Magnum **18.5**

Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009 Magnum **18.5**

Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 2000 Magnum **18.5**

Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009 Bottle **18**

Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2004 Magnum **18**

Joseph Perrier Cuvée Royale NV Brut Magnum **18**

producer or wine. When writing our notes, we were expected to record which of the two looked, smelled, or tasted younger and fresher, or oxidative and aldehydic, but when rating each wine, we simply scored it on merit. This would enable us to determine if for some reason we preferred a developed bottle over a fresher magnum. There are many reasons why we might, even if there is a universal magnum effect. Certainly magnums should not receive a higher score by default, only by virtue of a more appealing quality.

As far as the panel scores went, the top six were all magnums. Of these six, four were equal-top-scoring wines, and of those, only two were listed in the personal top wine lists of all three tasters—Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002 and Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 2000—which no doubt makes them the first among equals for the panel as a whole. The average rating for all the bottles was 15.8 compared to 16.6 for the magnums, a 5 percent higher score for the larger format. However, these averaged panel scores were based on a split decision among the three tasters, with me and Essi preferring only one of the bottles, while Simon preferred as many as six. With nine magnum preferences, Simon also leaned heavily toward the larger bottle format, but for him it was more of a majority decision.

Obviously I do not agree with all of Simon's scores, but that is part of WFW's philosophy. It is why we reveal individual scores and highlight personal

top wines, since this brings another equally valid viewpoint to the table. Of every colleague who has a different take on sparkling wine from me, he is the one I most enjoy tasting Champagne with. And do not believe Simon when he humbly defers to Essi and me as “vastly more experienced Champagne tasters.” He is a Master of Wine, after all, and a wine buyer for Berry Bros & Rudd, which arguably has the best wine range in the business, much of it thanks to Simon. He tastes Champagnes professionally as a buyer, and according to the BBR website, Champagne is one of his “three favorite areas of responsibility,” so Simon is a very experienced Champagne taster indeed, making his opinions more valid than most.

Funnily enough, the only 75cl bottle that either Essi or I preferred was of the same wine: Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve Brut. With the benefit of hindsight, this could have been because it was a 2012-based blend, and that year had (like 2008) classically high acids and great linearity. It’s certainly a year that needs time, which was, maybe, why it benefited from the quicker development afforded by the 75cl format. It was perhaps no coincidence that of the six bottles Simon preferred, he gave Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve Brut the highest differential (1.5 points, or 9 percent). So, even accounting for different tastes, the panel was in remarkable agreement.

On average, Essi scored the magnums 6 percent higher, while I

averaged 11 percent, and Simon, who preferred six bottles, scored them 1 percent lower overall (but averaged 3 percent higher for those magnums he did prefer). Since the tasting notes are published in panel-score order, the bottles more often than not become separated from the magnums, thus for an overview it helps to have the wines listed alphabetically and compare how individual tasters scored each pair of wines (*see table, opposite*).

Personal perspective

This exercise was, for me, just one of many, since I routinely taste bottles and magnums of the same Champagne or other sparkling wine, and like most *chefs de caves*, winemakers, and enologists, I am totally convinced by the so-called magnum effect. There will always be exceptions, of course, and for good reasons—such as the Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve Brut mentioned above. But generally speaking, magnums have more finesse. This is primarily the result of less and much slower oxidation but can also be due to lower pressure. The lower pressure is either because the wine is a Non-Vintage blend and magnums on the shelf often lag one blend behind the standard 75cl bottles of the same cuvée, or because the magnums are given longer to rest after disgorgement. Sometimes both of these circumstances will apply. The slower rate of oxidation not only produces a smoother-finished wine with no or less aldehydic aromas, but the lower the acetaldehyde, the less

debilitating the effect on the fruit—so there is generally more fruit in a magnum, and that fruit will have more finesse. This blind tasting, therefore, only served to confirm my very strongly held views.

Many years ago, I installed magnum racks in my cellar at home and switched exclusively to magnums for long-term storage, but in recent years I have begun to use magnums for everyday drinking as well, lasting me two days instead of one. Magnums are a barometer that clearly indicates how serious (or not) a sparkling-wine industry is. If an individual producer or region rarely produces magnums, it illustrates just how far that producer or region has to progress to compete with other sparkling-wine producers and regions in the world. It also restricts the potential of its customers to respect the ageworthiness of the sparkling wine produced, because serious sparkling-wine consumers like to cellar their wines. Too many producers feel trapped in a catch-22 situation when deciding whether to begin magnum production, believing they have no demand, and yet they cannot create any demand without first selling magnums. Eventually, the most serious sparkling-wine producers realize that customers cannot break out of this, only producers can, but the only producers who do are those who have as much belief in the potential of their customers as they do in the potential of their sparkling wine. That is why magnums are such an effective barometer.

COMPARISON OF THE SECOND FERMENTATION IN BOTTLE (RED) AND IN MAGNUM (GREEN)



SCORING DIFFERENTIAL

Wine (75cl & 150cl)	Essi Avellan MW			Simon Field MW			Tom Stevenson		
	Bottle	Magnum	Difference	Bottle	Magnum	Difference	Bottle	Magnum	Difference
Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve Brut NV	17	16	-1	16.5	15	-1.5	17	16.5	-0.5
Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut Blanc de Blancs NV	17.5	19	+1.5	14.5	13.5	-1	13	14	+1
Canard-Duchêne Authentic Vintage Brut 2008	17.5	18	+0.5	17	16.5	-0.5	15.5	16.5	+1
Collard-Picard Cuvée Prestige Coup de Coeur Brut NV	15	16	+1	14	14.5	+0.5	16.5	16.5	0
Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006	17.5	18.5	+1	16	16.5	+0.5	15	18.5	+3.5
Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009	16.5	17.5	+1	16	16.5	+0.5	18	18.5	+0.5
Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2000	17.5	19	+1.5	15.5	16.5	+1	16.5	18.5	+2
Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002	16.5	18.5	+2	18	17.5	-0.5	14	18.5	+4.5
Drappier Carte d'Or Brut NV	15.5	16.5	+1	15.5	16	+0.5	15	15	0
Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 2000	18	18.5	+0.5	16.5	17	+0.5	16	18.5	+2.5
Gosset Celebris Extra Brut 2002	15.5	16.5	+1	14.5	13.5	-1	12	13	+1
Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2004	16.5	18	+1.5	14.5	15	+0.5	17	18	+1
J de Telmont Grand Vintage Brut 2004	18	19	+1	16.5	17	+0.5	16	17	+1
Joseph Perrier Cuvée Royale NV Brut	15.5	16	+0.5	15.5	16	+0.5	16	18	+2
Mandois Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut 2010	15.5	16	+0.5	16.5	15.5	-1	15	17	+2
Moutard Cuvée des 6 Cépages Brut 2007	14	15	+1	14	13.5	-0.5	12	17	+5
Thiénot Cuvée Alain Thiénot Brut 2002	15.5	17	+1.5	17.5	16.5	-1	15.5	16.5	+1

tasting / savor / Champagne: Bottle vs Magnum

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2000 (12% ABV) Magnum | 18
(Disgorged October 13, 2013)

EA | Fine, toasty-charred tone to the refined, layered nose. Lovely crisp, lemony fruit, lovely energy and vibrancy to the fruit. Zingy and creamy at the same time. Climbing its way to the top. Slowly and harmoniously aging. | 19

SF | Slightly raw, its floral elegance not as immediately discernible... Grippy and impressive given its age, this example needs a little more time, but will be a very agreeable apéritif for those who like wines with a little more maturity. An attractive, discreet, nutty character comes into play on the second tasting. | 16.5

TS | Unbelievably fresh, lovely fruit, Chardonnay-dominant, lively, vigorous, and clearly outstanding. Magnum? | 18.5

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 (12% ABV) Magnum | 18
(Disgorged January 27, 2015)

EA | Quite similar to the [same wine from 75cl bottle], a tad tighter and more reserved. Zesty and vibrant, more lemony on the palate, less of easygoing charm. Very elegant and oozing future potential. Delicious fruit. | 18.5

SF | Equally reserved on the nose, the second example is linear, focused, and promising. The stone-fruit character and dry, almost austere finish underline inherent quality and capacity to age... | 16.5

TS | Significantly superior [to the same wine in 75cl], which demonstrates the difference the size of second-fermentation vessel makes. Really quite smooth and creamy, with a classic lean structure draped in beautifully delicate yeast-complexed fruit. Such finesse. And 2006, too! Magnum? | 18.5

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002 (12% ABV) Magnum | 18
(Disgorged January 27, 2015)

EA | Stunning toasty nose, none of the advanced evolution of the previous wine. All about coffee and cream. Super-crisp and delicious, full of life. Still going up? | 18.5

SF | Equally generous of hue and aroma as its twin, this wine seems, on reflection, a touch less expressive, its reserve nicely contained, its fruit character finely drawn, with plums and red apple both evidenced. | 17.5

TS | Slightly paler, no toffee notes, in fact no lactic aromas, dominating or otherwise. Chalk and cheese [with its twin], yet so obviously the same wine. Beautifully clean and fresh fruit with lovely toasty notes. From a wine that is old before its time to a wine that is young for its year! In fact, it needs more post-disgorgement aging. Magnum? | 18.5

Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 2000 (12.5% ABV) Magnum | 18
(Disgorged October 27, 2014)

EA | Overt, ripe, evolving nose with leesy richness. Lovely toasty undertone. Rich and vibrant at

the same time, attractive lemony fruit. Creamy smooth palate, with a zingy crisp finish. Long, sweet-boosted fruity palate. | 18.5

SF | A rich golden color; a nose of praline, mango, forest floor, and hints of cardamom... The palate betrays an oaky upbringing but has sufficient minerality, complete with notes of iodine and tobacco, to ensure the taster's fascination and to underwrite inherent complexity. | 17

TS | Paler, more green spectrum. Lovely, creamy-fresh fruit with a perfectly judged dosage. | 18.5

Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009 (12% ABV) Magnum | 17.5
(Disgorged October 18, 2014)

EA | Brighter nose, with crisp yellow fruit and a fine toasty undertone. More exuberantly fruity on the palate, with enhanced length. Succulent and fresh, with fine intense fruitiness. | 17.5

SF | This one is a little more restrained on the nose but maintains a pleasing floral personality. A persistent mousse, and a predominantly citric mouthfeel informs the palate, where the sweetness has been cleverly held in check and where the finish is finely etched. | 16.5

TS | Just so complete and lush, without losing any elegance. Delicious, smooth, youthfully complex, honeyed, and with a beguiling creamy mousse. Magnum? | 18.5

J de Telmont Grand Vintage Brut 2004 (12% ABV) Magnum | 17.5
(Disgorged week ending July 31, 2015)

EA | Slowly-aged, cool, crisp white-fruit nose. Attractive coffee-shop tones coming through. Lovely gunpowder and toast line the ripe fruitiness. Deliciously creamy and age-mellowed palate, with a leesy richness. So succulent and inviting. | 19

SF | A delightful nose of spring flowers, hazelnut, soft spice, and gunpowder. The palate, after all that, is a little closed, energetic yet lacking composure. This may well be as a result of a recent disgorgement... Potential underwrites the ensemble, however. | 17

TS | If not lighter, then certainly leans more to the green spectrum than the other one in this pair. Fresh aromatics, with fleshy, peachy fruit on the palate. Has power, vigor, and a distinctive finish. Very recent disgorgement. Needs some post-disgorgement aging to soften and coalesce. Magnum? | 17

Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve Brut NV (12% ABV) Bottle | 17
(Disgorged July 29, 2015)

EA | More expressive and fresher nose with cleaner fruitiness. Fine succulent palate with deliciously fruity finish. Missing all the austerity of the other in the pair. | 17

SF | The nose is equally restrained, with a few hints of nectarine and wet stone. The palate is rather forward, exuberant, with citric fruit, taut balancing acidity, and a dry, elegant finish. Additional bass notes by comparison with the other in the pair add interest and complexity. | 16.5

ESSI AVELLAN MW'S VERDICT

On the basis of both experience and gut feeling, I have long been convinced of the superiority of magnums over bottles. It is seldom, however, that one has the opportunity to taste Champagnes from exactly the same batch disgorged at the same moment. And we had a sizable enough sample in this tasting to allow us to draw conclusions.

Even if I was a believer before, I am even more so after this convincing tasting. I myself preferred the magnum over the bottle 15 times out of 16. And that was also the overall verdict for the whole tasting, since only Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve was considered better in bottle than in magnum. (For Simon it was equally good in both formats.)

It was rather easy to pick out the magnums for their superior finesse and youthfulness and less oxidative character. But I was surprised how considerable the differences were: I normally gave at least one point more for the magnum. In the case of Deutz Cuvée William Deutz 2002, I gave as much as two points more for the magnum. All in all, the winner in this tasting was Deutz—but only for their magnums. The bottles were rated considerably lower by us, and it is to be hoped that they will take the message on-board.

My biggest positive surprise of the tasting was J de Telmont Grand Vintage 2004, which was showing gorgeously, especially in magnum. I liked Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Blanc de Blancs much more than my fellow tasters, but it was sad that there were obvious light-taint issues with some of the bottles due to the clear glass bottles.

I conclude that even if magnums are often slightly more expensive than bottles pro rata, the quality increase easily compensates for the difference, making the magnums better value for money. The question that inevitably arises after this tasting is about the difference between Jéroboams and magnums... Our next tasting, Tom?

TOP WINES

Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut Blanc de Blancs NV Magnum 19

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2000 Magnum 19

J de Telmont Grand Vintage Brut 2004 Magnum 19

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002 Magnum 18.5

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 Magnum 18.5

Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 2000 Magnum 18.5

TS | The biggest difference here is the creaminess and fluffiness of the mousse over the other one [in this pair]. Very fresh, very clean, nicely light structured. Magnum? | **17**

Canard-Duchêne Authentic Vintage Brut 2008 Magnum | **17**
(Disgorged June 2014; 9g/l dosage)

EA | Less advanced nose, bright yellow fruit, vanilla and lemon. Fresher and crisper palate, quite a difference here. | **18**

SF | With a firmer nose than its partner, this one nonetheless impresses with its focus and complexity. The acidity seems to have more grip on this example, perhaps heralding a longer development? | **16.5**

TS | Slightly phenolic fruit, clean and grippy, with an edgy-nervy structure. | **16.5**

Deutz Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009 | **17**
(12% ABV) Bottle
(Disgorged October 29, 2014)

EA | Ripe, round, softly fruity apricot nose with leesy richness and toffee-apple sweetness. Some evolution on the aromatics. Round, mouth-filling, smooth-moussed palate, with a balanced finish. | **16.5**

SF | An attractive nose of elderflower and mirabelle plum. The mouthfeel is broad and almost disarmingly sweet, a sweetness born out of ripeness rather than excessive dosage... Mangoes, figs, and pastry notes complement the fruit character. Rigor and restraint. | **16**

TS | A touch oxidative on the nose, but really nothing in the scheme of things. A totally different structure from what has gone before (all Non-Vintage up to now), more muscular and full, but only in the most elegant of terms. And the fruit is noticeably far more yeast-complexed. Definitely a food wine that I would love to give a couple more years in bottle. | **18**

Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru Brut 2000 (12.5% ABV) Bottle | **17**
(Disgorged October 24, 2013)

EA | Rich fruitiness, but it comes with an underlying oxidative note. Mellow rich palate with big, bold finish. Less refined and seamless than the previous. | **18**

SF | This example has a deeper color and richer, more chocolaty notes on the nose; praline, peach, and fig all play their part, but the ensemble here appears to be more developed, richer and more complete than its partner. A most satisfactory recollection of a tricky but maybe, hugely ironically, slightly undervalued vintage? | **16.5**

TS | More golden color, with toffee-infused fruit aromas. | **16**

Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2004 (12% ABV) Magnum | **17**
(Disgorged July 2014)

EA | Lovely, soft, toasty nose here, bringing layers. So much livelier and creamier on the palate.

Massive difference between the two. Succulent sweet-and-sour zestiness. | **18**

SF | Slightly deeper color and a nose that is rather more approachable than that of the other half of this pair... The mouthfeel is, however, similarly incomplete, and this time less understandably so. | **15**

TS | Distinctly paler in color and much fresher on the nose. Still could benefit from a few years' post-disgorgement aging, but a star in the making. Magnum? | **18**

J de Telmont Grand Vintage Brut 2004 (12% ABV) Bottle | **17**
(Disgorged week ending July 31, 2015)

EA | On the nose, more evolution and less on the toasty side. A fine palate here, too, but the previous one of the pair was more seamless and caressing. | **18**

SF | An equally attractive nose as that of the other in the pair, floral and gently fruity, with hints of plum and spice. The palate is still a little unformed, the acidity dominating the ensemble. With a little more post-disgorgement aging, I am sure that it will gather composure and show its true, not inconsequential colors. | **16.5**

TS | More evolved on both nose and palate, and the mousse has softened. | **16**

Canard-Duchêne Authentic Vintage Brut 2008 (12% ABV) Bottle | **16.5**
(Disgorged June 2014; 11g/l dosage)

EA | Expressive, attractively charred nose showing some interesting evolution. Full and round, rather calm and winey palate. Develops some sweaty aromas in the glass. Second bottle was notably cleaner. Sweet fruitiness; fine, firm body; and good length. | **17.5**

SF | A rather inconsequential color belies an intense and beautifully complex nose, a symphony of fruit and spice; the palate has grip, structure, and great depth of fruit, which satisfies immediately and promises greatly. There are notes of both white chocolate and tobacco on the finish. | **17**

TS | The first bottle had slight stink. Second bottle: Nicely evolved yeast-complexed fruit and smooth, creamy mousse on the palate. Scored for this second bottle, which was absolutely clean. Magnum? | **15.5**

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2000 (12% ABV) Bottle | **16.5**
(Disgorged October 29, 2013)

EA | Plush, sweet-fruit nose, very finely lined by oxidative evolution. Sweet and generous on the palate, with concentrated fruitiness. Long, sweet finish. | **18**

SF | A lively color and effervescent profile; the wine has aromas of fig, peach, and summer flowers. The palate is broad, textured, reasonably sweet, and yet also quite evolved, seemingly. The acidity kicks back on the finish and lends rigor and focus. | **15.5**

TS | A well-preserved 2000 if in a 75cl bottle. Good, clean, but not outstanding. | **16.5**

Joseph Perrier Cuvée Royale NV Brut (12% ABV) Magnum | **16.5**
(2010-based, disgorged March 2014)

EA | Similar nose but with less oxidative characters. Yellow apple instead of bruised apple. Lovely fruit intensity on the palate. Appears more fruity and exuberant on the palate. | **16**

SF | No conspicuous color differential, the nose may be a tad richer, with hints of almond and gunflint. The palate, rather surprisingly, seems fresher, with more focus and citric thrust and more to resolve on the finish. Marginally more going on here, with more obvious integration at the end. | **16**

TS | Chalk and cheese! Fresh aroma, without any aldehydic aromas, very fruity on palate. Such fruitiness in comparison that I would not believe this is the same blend. So much so, in fact, that I will have to double-check with whoever the producer is to make sure that this is not just a bottle and magnum of the same cuvée, rather than the same blend of the same cuvée. Magnum? | **18**

Thiénot Cuvée Alain Thiénot Brut 2002 (12.5% ABV) Magnum | **16.5**
(Disgorged January 2015; 8g/l dosage)

EA | Lovely freshness and creaminess on this one on top of the apricot fruit. Lively, vibrant palate and a sweet, fruity finish. Approaching its prime. There is a big difference between the two. | **17**

SF | Slightly lighter in color and, for that matter, less aromatic than its twin. The wine is leaner, more taut, and will need a little more time... | **16.5**

TS | Fresher, gooeey-creamier; not my favorite 2002, but clearly the magnum. | **16.5**

Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve Brut NV | **16**
(12% ABV) Magnum (2012-based; disgorged July 29, 2015)

EA | Mild white-fruit nose with vanilla and apricot pie. A mild oxidative nuance to the fruit. Full, intense, very fresh palate, with medium length. A touch austere. | **16**

SF | Modest of hue and rather restrained on the nose, then citric notes pervade the palate, which is very youthful and still gathering composure after disgorgement. | **15**

TS | Extremely fruity, another easy-drinking style. Soft ripe apples like Beauty of Bath. Quite long. | **16.5**

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 (12% ABV) Bottle | **16**
(Disgorged January 23, 2015)

EA | Mild, rather muted, clean white-fruit profile. Vanilla-laden fruit and gentle toastiness emerging. Full, soft, and round, fluffy palate, highly creamy. There is really appealing easiness to it. | **17.5**

SF | A gentle straw color then a restrained subtle nose, which has yeasty autolytic development and hints of red fruit. The palate is finely drawn, with a backbone of orchard fruit harnessed by a sensible dosage and hints of plum and brioche on the finish... | **16**

tasting / savor / Champagne: Bottle vs Magnum

TS | Fresh and simple. The continental year of 2006 is not my favorite vintage. There are some wonderful exceptions, but this is about par for the course. | **15**

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002 (12% ABV) Bottle | **16**
(Disgorged December 16, 2014)

EA | Ripe fruity nose with some evolution. Apple jam and baking spices. Full and round, mouth-filling palate, with soft mousse. Rather mature aromatically but plenty of fruit. | **16.5**

SF | An attractive color is complemented by a rich and complex nose, with *pain au chocolat*, ripe plum, and white chocolate all evidenced. The palate is rich and engaging, its spicy notes harmoniously entwined with red berry fruit and gently exotic evocations that recall, appropriately enough, a fantastic harvest in the region... | **18**

TS | The slightly deeper of the two, with toffee-infused lactic aromas dominating. Very rich aftertaste for such a classic structured Champagne. Old before its time. | **14**

Draprier Carte d'Or NV (12% ABV) Magnum (2012-based; disgorged March 2015; 6g/l dosage) | **16**

EA | Overt, soft apple and pastry-shop nose. Full and round, super-smooth palate. Fine, fresh, sweet-and-sour finish. | **16.5**

SF | A forward nose of pumice and pear confit; behind that, notes of tobacco and pastry. The mouth is full-bodied and rather forward, adolescent in its intensity and hitherto rather pinched at the finish. The power and potential are both there, however... | **16**

TS | Paler color, less yellow, too. Full of very fresh-disgorged aromas, light and fragrant (if simple) fruit on the palate. Magnum? | **15**

Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2004 (12% ABV) Bottle | **16**
(Disgorged July 2015)

EA | Round, slightly obvious nose, one-dimensional apple and malt aromas. Rather pungent, singular palate too. Winery and round. Ready to drink. | **16.5**

SF | Reduced, rather rubbery nose. The palate is oak, rich, sinewy, and incomplete. | **14.5**

TS | Far more evolved, with notes of toffee and cocoa floating around the plums and nectarines in the fruit. | **17**

Mandois Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut 2010 (12% ABV) Magnum (Disgorged April 2015) | **16**

EA | Stylish, evolving, yellow-plum-and-peach nose, comes with subdued French pastry nuances. Sweet-seeming finish, with plenty of rich fruit. Round and viscous, with a sweet ending. | **16**

SF | A modest color, then a nose that recalls peach-kernels and wet pavements. The palate is quite sweet, with notes of baking spice and

pâtisserie evidenced. The finish is quite abrupt. Time is on its side. | **15.5**

TS | Aromatically smooth, no aldehydic aromas. Rich and tasty, yeast-complexed fruit. Has a quiet power and resonance. Magnum? | **17**

Thiénot Cuvée Alain Thiénot Brut 2002 (12.5% ABV) Bottle | **16**
(Disgorged January 2015; 8g/l dosage)

EA | Evolved, singular, sweet, confectioned fruit nose. Apricot marmalade debut, along with some sweaty and earthy tones. Unattractive evolution. Sweet, viscous palate and fruity length. Slightly past its peak already. | **15.5**

SF | A rich golden color, then a nose of praline, fig, and Marie Antoinette's boudoir. Honey and silk inform the palate, their decadence pleasingly entwined with taut acidity, chalky rigor, and all the well-rehearsed merits of this famous vintage. | **17.5**

TS | Rich, toffee-infused fruit here on nose and palate. | **15.5**

Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut Blanc de Blancs NV (12.5% ABV) Magnum (2008-based; disgorged October 2013) | **15.5**

EA | Beautiful, toasty and gunpowdery notes on the classy, pure fruity nose. Super-fresh, zesty and linear, driven palate with a fine acid line. Mouthwatering and invigorating. Lovely bright, glossy fruit expression. Delicious. | **19**

SF | Nose rather closed, oak, in a temperamental adolescent phase. Reduced to clear. Little to redeem the palate, which has a tight rubbery character and a somewhat aggressive finish. | **13.5**

TS | Thin, ribby, acidic, with more bone than meat to the fruit. | **14**

Collard-Picard Cuvée Prestige Champagne Prestige Brut NV (12.5% ABV) Magnum (disgorged December 4, 2014; 11g/l dosage) | **15.5**

EA | A little cleaner, with a toasty character pushing through. Much more succulent palate, with plenty of attractive fruit. Lovely sweet-and-sour finish. | **16**

SF | Nose a little more restrained, with vestigial flinty aromas. Palate is again rather sweet, albeit less obviously so than its sibling, its finish sinuous and lacking a velvety purity. | **14.5**

TS | No (or, at least, extremely few) aldehydic aromas, but less expressive, less complex fruit on the palate. Tastes slightly sweeter. Mousse not quite as fluffy. Swings and roundabouts. Magnum? | **16.5**

Draprier Carte d'Or Brut NV (12% ABV) Bottle (2008-based; disgorged March 2015; 6g/l dosage) | **15.5**

EA | Slightly more advanced, apple nose. Harsher and more drying palate, with apple-seedy finish. | **15.5**

SF | The nose is a little more forward and oxidative; the palate feels more evolved, fatter, and

even a touch sweeter, though the concentration on the finish has a similar resonance. | **15.5**

TS | More freshly disgorged aromas, but on a more evolved base of wine. More fruity than yeast-complexed fruit. Easy-drinking style. | **15**

Mandois Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut 2010 (12% ABV) Bottle (Disgorged April 2015) | **15.5**

EA | A touch more apple oxidation on the nose. Similar palate but does not quite have the same charm and appeal as the previous. | **15.5**

SF | The second wine in the pair has a more forward aroma, with citric fruits sharing the billing with mangoes and poached pear. The palate is relatively unformed, almost tannic, its yellow fruit profile hitherto somewhat obscured by a recent disgorgement and a generous dosage. | **16.5**

TS | An aldehydic version of the other bottle format of this wine. | **15**

Joseph Perrier Cuvée Royale NV Brut (12% ABV) Bottle (2011-based; disgorged October 2014) | **15.5**

EA | Soft, youthful pâtisserie and spicy red-fruit-and-apple-peel nose, with some bruised oxidative characters and earthy notes (which enhance in the glass over time). Crisp, zesty, dry palate. Smooth, creamy texture, with a fluffy mousse and lightweight palate. | **15**

SF | Straw-gold color, then a refreshing nose of summer flowers, with hints of ginger and brioche. The palate is dry and soft, with notes of nougat and baking spice heralding a clean if rather clipped finish. Dosage rather obvious at the moment. | **15.5**

TS | A touch aldehydic, but acceptably so. Youthful ripe pear (but not amylic). Fresh, good vigor. Nice acid balance. | **16**

Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut Blanc de Blancs NV (12.5% ABV) Bottle (2008-based; disgorged October 2013) | **15**

EA | A more advanced nose, with less gunpowder and more ripe white fruit, a touch sweaty and not as perfectly pure as the previous wine. Not as seamless either, but still very good. The second bottle was even worse: obvious light taint. | **17.5**

SF | Less reduction and obvious oak influence on the second wine; intimations of exotic fruit and even a whisper of white chocolate. A not entirely clean aroma. The palate is broader, more generous of fruit profile, and longer. Vinous style, lacking a little energy and exuberance maybe. The second example is a little more lively but still wants a little in its basic construction, which is a little clumsy. | **14.5**

TS | First bottle had a fishy aroma; the second, more sweaty. Suspected DMDS from light-strike and received confirmation on request whether this is a clear bottle. It is such a pity that a winemaker's efforts are destroyed by the use of clear glass bottles! Richer fruit on the palate, with a nice balance between freshness and mellowness. Without DMDS this would have scored 16.5. Magnum? | **13**

SIMON FIELD MW'S VERDICT

Tom's peerless contact list in Champagne has again conspired with his inexhaustible taste for empirical inquiry, not to mention first-class organizational skills, and so we gathered once more, fortunate beneficiaries of another fascinating tasting—this time to compare bottles and magnums. And the results have, as always, been suitably intriguing.

We were served from a broad range of vintages and differing disgorgement dates, and yet there was no shortage of interesting conclusions. Overall, I marginally preferred the magnum in each pair to the bottle, though for me the difference in scores between the two was generally very slight. My colleagues, both vastly more experienced Champagne tasters, were more inclined to favor the magnums, which I find especially fascinating because we all agreed which were the best wines per se (Besserat de Bellefon being a conspicuous exception), and yet, when push came to shove, they would more consistently favor the magnum in a pair. To take a particularly telling example, we all agreed that Deutz Cuvée William Deutz 2002 was excellent, yet I scored the bottle half a point higher than the magnum (18 versus 17.5), while Tom and Essi favored the magnum by some margin. I wrote that the sample that turned out to be the magnum was "a touch less expressive [with] its reserve nicely contained," and I suspect that it was this very reserve, this brimming potential, that inspired Essi to write "still going up."

This provides a pithy summary for the whole tasting; a lot of the bottles were delicious, forward, and relatively mature, but the real complexity, albeit sometimes masked by youth, resided in the magnums. Individuals may prefer one style over another, which is only to be expected, but the magnums are demonstrably slower to mature and tighter and tauter of structure. With that firmly in mind, and with ever more transparent information offered about disgorgement dates and so forth, buyers have never been better placed to select the right bottle (or magnum) with confidence.

TOP WINES

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002
Bottle **18**

Deutz Cuvée William Deutz Brut 2002
Magnum **17.5**

Thiénot Cuvée Alain Thiénot Brut 2002
Bottle **17.5**

Canard-Duchêne Authentic Vintage Brut 2008
Bottle **17**

J de Telmont Grand Vintage Brut 2004
Magnum **17**

Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne Grand Cru
Brut 2000 Magnum **17**

Collard-Picard Cuvée Prestige Coup de Coeur Brut NV

(12.5% ABV) Bottle (2008-based; disgorged December 4, 2014; 10.9g/l dosage) **15**

EA | Overt, red-fruit nose with biscuity and spicy complexity. Earthy on the palate and notably on the oxidative side. Apple-seed bitterness. Otherwise, round and fleshy. **| 15**

SF | Straw color and dried-fruit aromas. The palate actually seems quite sweet, with exotic fruit and autolytic notes quite pleasingly juxtaposed, but there is little here to challenge the intellect. **| 14**

TS | Aldehydic aromas, really quite strong. Impressions of oak. Fresh, creamy-zingy fruit on the palate. Good yeast-complexed fruit, lovely fluffy mousse. **| 16.5**

Moutard Cuvée des 6 Cépages Brut 2007

(12% ABV) Magnum (Disgorged May 26, 2014) **15**

EA | Very deep browning color. On the nose, sweet botrytized fruit with dried apricots, highly evolved but not in a very oxidative way. This seems almost like a sparkling Sauternes! Big, fleshy palate and a long, sweet finish. One of a kind. **| 15**

SF | Deep color. Spanish gold, summer beer, you name it... The nose is suitably outlandish: oxidative, with figs and walnuts behind. The palate is oaky, rich, evolved, with bruised apples and maybe bruised egos evidenced. Who can say? **| 13.5**

TS | Disturbingly deep, old-gold color, though not as deep as the other bottle format in this pair. An attractive toasty aroma followed by peaches and raspberry-ripple ice-cream fruit on the palate. If this were a 1947 Vintage, it would merit 19 out of 20, but it is not—it is 60 years younger, so it gets something for immediate pleasure and a health warning to drink up immediately! Magnum? **| 17**

Gosset Celebris Extra Brut 2002

(12% ABV) Magnum (Disgorged July 2014) **14.5**

EA | Brighter fruit, with a touch of toast, lemon, and cloves. More vivacity on the palate, too. Drinking perfectly now, but there seems to be little aging potential. **| 16.5**

SF | Slightly deeper of color, this wine is less obviously embarrassed by the strictures of its winemaker. For all the potential, veiled or otherwise, there nonetheless seem to be issues with the fundamental quality of the fruit here. **| 13.5**

TS | Absolutely fresh in terms of the wine itself, with no hint of plastic or polythene on the nose [as there was in the other in the pair], but there is TCA! And again is no backup. There was, however, a lovely gentle toasty aroma pervading the fruit until it was spoiled by TCA. On the basis of color, the other one in the pair seems more likely to be the magnum. But on quality (minus the faults, of course), this could well be it... **| 13**

Gosset Celebris Extra Brut 2002

(12% ABV) Bottle (Disgorged July 2014) **14**

EA | Evolved, sweet-winey, flat nose, with honey-laden fruit. Thick, viscous palate, drying finish. Appears aged. **| 15.5**

SF | A rather rubbery, oaky, unresolved nose is echoed on the palate, where the mechanics of the winemaking currently rather distract from the ensemble, and the intimations of attractive fruit are challenged by extraneous and somewhat troubling factors. **| 14.5**

TS | First bottle had an all-pervading polythene or plastic aroma, and we had no backup. **| 12**

Moutard Cuvée des 6 Cépages Brut 2007

(12% ABV) Bottle (Disgorged June 24, 2014) **13.5**

EA | Much more oxidative evolution on this one. Nuttiness has taken over some of the fruit. Sweet, cloying finish. Tiring. **| 14**

SF | Faithful to the idiosyncratic personality of its sibling, a richly oaky example, autumnal and evolved, and a touch volatile as well. Caramel and quince on the palate, jambon cru and figs. This is in a style that may not meet with universal acclaim, but the wine is certainly not without interest. **| 14**

TS | This is surely the older, more oxidative version of the other bottle format of this pair, and it quite vividly illustrates where that particular bottling will be in a very short time from now. **| 12**

The following wines arrived too late for the main panel tasting but were tasted afterward by Tom Stevenson, in full sight of both the label and the size of the bottle:

Pierre Gimonnet Cuvée Fleuron 2006

Bottle

TS | Slightly deeper in color, with golden hues and stronger, more aldehydic aromas, plus a touch of toffee. A stronger but shorter, more aldehydic palate. Very much a food wine, but this bottle is coarser than the magnum, with a more abrupt finish. **| 15.5**

Pierre Gimonnet Cuvée Fleuron 2006

Magnum

TS | Lighter in color, with lemon rather than golden hues. A smoother, finer aroma than the bottle, which is rather too creamy-buttery lactic at first, but this recedes and sometimes almost entirely disappears, though in a constantly changing nose it goes back and forth in a less pronounced form. The palate is also smoother than from the bottle, and the mousse finer, with lovely, creamy Chardonnay fruit stretching on and on. Yes, there are aldehydic notes, but they are relatively fleeting and do not deplete the wine's fruitiness, creaminess, or length. A fine balance between aldehydes and creaminess gives this Champagne a mesmerizing complexity and makes it a food wine for truly haute cuisine. **| 18** ■