

2006 v 2007 CHAMPAGNE BEST OF AN AVERAGE BUNCH?

Tom Stevenson introduces a tasting shared with Essi Avellan MW and Alex Hunt MW in which they compared two consecutive vintages where most Champagne producers chose to declare either one or the other. Even those who made both years seldom did so for the same cuvée

To be brutally honest, neither of these vintages has excited me much. For some reason, I have spent more time decrying the 2006 vintage than I have any other widely declared year. But everything is relative, and at the very time I was criticizing 2006, had someone asked me to pick between 2006 and 2007, I would probably have chosen 2006.

There are always exceptions, of course, and this tasting has happily identified some of the very best exceptions produced in each of these years, but in general terms they are both second-tier vintages. Neither can be compared to the classic 2002, 2004, or 2009, let alone the truly great 2008, 2012, or 2015. So, within this context, how did 2006 and 2007 differ?

The obvious difference is that 2006 was a traditional September harvest, and 2007 was an August harvest. Generally, the 2006 base wines were riper with less acidity, possessing an average potential alcohol of 10.2% ABV, an average total acidity of 7.0g/l (expressed as sulfuric, 10.8g/l as tartaric), and a pH of 3.15, while the 2007 base wines had a potential alcohol of 9.4% ABV, an average total acidity of 8.6g/l (expressed as sulfuric, 13.2g/l as tartaric), and a pH of 3.02. Most Champagne grapes with a potential alcohol of 9% ABV or more are acid-ripe (at least 50% tartaric acid), but 2007 averaged only 47% tartaric, while 2006 was exceptionally ripe at 57% tartaric.

In 2006, the days between peak flowering and peak harvest averaged

HARVEST DATES

Département	2006	Chardonnay	Pinot Noir	Meunier
Marne	First villages to pick	September 7	September 7	September 7
	Last villages to pick	September 23	September 23	September 25
Aube	First villages to pick	September 8	September 11	September 11
	Last villages to pick	September 15	September 15	September 15
Aisne	First villages to pick	September 18	September 15	September 15
	Last villages to pick	September 21	September 21	September 25
Département	2007	Chardonnay	Pinot Noir	Meunier
Marne	First villages to pick	August 23	August 20	August 23
	Last villages to pick	September 7	September 5	September 6
Aube	First villages to pick	August 24	August 23	August 23
	Last villages to pick	September 5	September 5	September 5
Aisne	First villages to pick	August 27	August 24	August 24
	Last villages to pick	September 6	September 3	September 3

ALL WINES

Tasters	Average	Range	2006 average	2007 average	2007 average	2007 range	2006 90+ wines	2007 90+ wines
EA	88	78-92	88	87	83-95	78-92	10 (63%)	6
AH	86	75-93	87	85	75-93	75-93	8 (57%)	6
TS	86	50-92	88	83	80-95	50-95	10 (67%)	5
Panel	87	68-92	88	83	81-92	68-91	7 (54%)	6

DIRECT-COMPARISON WINES ONLY

Tasters	Total pairs	2006 preferred	2007 preferred	2006 & 2007 equal
EA	15	12 (80%)	2	1
AH	15	10 (67%)	3	2
TS	15	11 (73%)	2	2
Panel	15	12 (80%)	2	1

91 days for all three major varieties, and in 2007 it averaged 92 days for Pinot Noir and 90 days for Meunier—all very similar and all well short of Champagne's well-trumpeted "ideal" of 100 days. The only significant difference was the 2007 Chardonnay, which averaged 96 days, and this was evident in the press, where they were softer, easier, and quicker to press. The 2007 Chardonnay was also extremely clean, and at 49% tartaric it was almost acid-ripe, unlike the other two grape varieties that year. Indeed, Chardonnay was about the only thing that stood out in the 2007 vintage, especially from the vineyards of the Aisne *département*, to the west of the region.

The tasting

When I first analyzed the scores, it was clear that 2006 came out ahead, but the numbers did not demonstrate the margin of victory I had expected, nor did it tally with how I felt after the tasting. I distinctly remember how palpable the relief was when the 2006s were poured, having become tired of finding too many dark and oxidized 2007s. When I pulled back to take a broader overview of the tasting, however, the distinct preference for 2006 became more obvious.

We found significantly more 2006s than 2007s scoring 90 points or more. I scored 90+ for ten of the 2006s compared to just five 2007s, and this 10–5 victory gives a more realistic reflection of how I felt after the tasting.

2006 IS THE VINTAGE OF CHOICE, AND ANYONE WHO PURCHASES A 2007 SHOULD DO SO CAUTIOUSLY TO AVOID OXIDIZED OR ROT-LADEN FAILURES

Even Alex, whose scores showed the lowest margin for 2006, was 8–6 in favor of 2006, while Essi was a more emphatic 10–6 in favor. For the most meaningful comparison of these two vintages, we have to confine ourselves to the 15 pairs of wine where we received exactly the same cuvée in exactly the same bottle format, and it is here that we see how 2006 truly stands out, as each judge preferred between ten and 12 of the 2006s compared to just two or three 2007s, with only one or two pairs scoring equal (see the Direct-Comparison Wines Only box, *opposite*).

This demonstrates that, while there might not be much quality difference between the best of both vintages, 2006 is without a doubt the vintage of choice, and anyone who purchases a 2007 should do so cautiously to avoid oxidized or rot-laden failures. We wholeheartedly recommend any of the top-scoring 2007s we tasted, but if you are buying 2007 blind or ordering it from a wine list, the best tip is to choose a blanc de blancs.

AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	87	50–96
EA	88	78–95
AH	86	75–93
TS	86	50–96

TOM STEVENSON'S TOP WINES

Laurent-Perrier Brut 2007 (magnum)	95
Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines 2006	95
Franck Bonville Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 2006	95
Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2006	92
Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2007	92
Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut (Blanc de Blancs) 2006	91
Philipponnat 1552 Rosé 2006	91
Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006	90
Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2007	90
Beaumont des Crayères Nostalgie Brut 2006	90
Castelnau Blanc de Blancs 2006	90
Thienot Cuvée Stanislas Blanc de Blancs Brut 2007	90
De Venoge Cordon Bleu Chardonnay Brut 2006	90
Moutard Brut Cuvée des 6 Cépages 2007 (magnum)	90
Philipponnat Clos des Goisses 2006	90
Ruinart Brut 2006 (magnum)	89
Beaumont des Crayères Fleur de Prestige Brut 2006	89
Deutz Brut 2007	89
Montaudon Brut Millesimé 2006	89
Castelnau Blanc de Blancs 2007	89
Philipponnat Clos des Goisses 2007	89

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 (12% ABV)

92

EA | Medium-deep lemony color. Plush, generous nose with vanilla-laden ripe white-fruit profile. Gentle toastiness bringing complexity. Creamy, and the mild yogurty character comes through more on the taste. Lovely, super-smooth mousse and succulent fruitiness. Long, fruity, elegant length. Comes with charm and quaffing character. | 92

AH | Lots of lemony-reductive fresh-bread aroma here. Dynamic feel in the mouth, *dosage* well integrated, fully ready but with plenty of life still. A very harmonious Vintage Champagne. | 93

TS | A lovely, bright, pale-lemon colour. Fresh and creamy-zesty fruit aromas nose and palate. Long, focused, citrus-fruit finish. Fine, dry brut aftertaste. | 90

Ruinart Brut 2006 (magnum) (12.5% ABV)

92

EA | Reductive, beautiful gunpowdery nose with cool, crisp, sweet fruit of fine ripeness. Lemon, smoke, flowers... Promising and still youthful. Pristine palate, too. Super-pure and polished, muscular and fruit-packed. Has great further potential. | 95

AH | Bright gold in color and with lovely grilled-nuts reduction, this is a promising first impression. There's still lots of (fine) fizz and a core of lemony flavor that keeps the palate cohesive. Slight bitterness on the end is the only downside; apart from that, it's both indulgent and invigorating. | 92

TS | Pale color with gunpowder reductive aroma that will eventually go toasty. Fresh, fine, yeast-complexed fruit. Smooth and long. | 89



PURE, LIVELY, APPEALING NOSE, WITH AN APPETIZING NOTE OF GRILLED NUTS. GOOD BODY AND POWER ON THE PALATE, WHILE RETAINING FINESSE. DRY, VINOUS STYLE WITH PLENTY OF ENERGY LEFT IN RESERVE

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2006 (12.5% ABV)

92

EA | Pale lemon. Lovely tamed fireworks whiffs on the pristinely yet subtly fruity nose. Vanilla-laden white fruits. Slightly coarse mousse but otherwise very correct. Excellent, fresh lemony fruitiness and long, invigorating finish. | 92

AH | Pure, lively, apple nose, with an appetizing note of grilled nuts. Good body and power on the palate, while retaining finesse. Dry, vinous style with plenty of energy left in reserve. | 93

TS | Pale lemon and starbright, with pristinely fresh, yeast-complexed, citrus-aroma nose and palate. Classic lean structure, nicely focused fruit tapering to a clean brut finish. | 92


Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2007 (12% ABV)

91

EA | Bright lemony color. Gunpowdery smokiness dominates the fragrant nose. Plush white-fruit profile. Lovely freshness and linearity to it, plenty of energy and juicy fruit. Not super-complex or fine but pleasurable and vivacious. | 91

AH | Pale, aromatically restrained with savory-bready notes to the fore, this is very classically styled Champagne. There is appealing mid-palate weight (though nothing excessive or opulent) and a long, chalky finish. At this stage, it's a wine to appreciate more than adore, but its sinewy form should unfurl into something delightful a few years from now. | 91

TS | Pale colored, fresh, fine, and classically lean, structured with a lovely creamy-vanilla finish and the promise of development in years to come. Now or the next five years. | 90

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2007 (12.5% ABV)

91

EA | Fresh fragrant nose with floral tones. Attractive cool fruitiness with a touch of vanilla. Crisp palate with smooth texture and fine intensity. Playful, bright fruity style with elegance. | 90

AH | Pale, fresh color and a very youthful lemony-chalky nose; the palate shows great purity and cohesion. It's not flashy or particularly complex, but there is lovely symmetry and a hint of reductive spark that lifts it. Neat and classy. | 92

TS | Bright lemon-straw color, with restrained aromas at the moment, but superbly fine,

extraordinarily youthful, yeast-complexed fruit on the palate. One of the few truly classy 2007 wines in our tasting. | 92

Beaumont des Crayères Nostalgie Brut 2006 (12% ABV)

90

EA | Deep lemon-gold color. Generous, overt, super-ripe nose, with spicy fruit and pastry complexity. Round ample palate in line with what the nose promised. Weighty, almost oily but has enough acidity. Big Champagne but has built-in complexity and power. | 91

AH | Not old, exactly, but a rather light, dusty nose. The palate is gentle and has more character, particularly peach and apple fruit, and an attractive mousse. Rounded, harmonious, *à point*. | 88

TS | Light-to-medium lemon-straw color. Fresh, zesty-citrus fruit. Really youthful for an 11-year-old wine. Another keeper. | 90


Castelnaud Blanc de Blancs 2006 (12.5% ABV)

90

EA | Fresh, fragrantly fruity nose with perfumed fruit, flower potpourri, toast, and lime zinginess. A light lactic whiff. Full and soft, plush palate, with enough freshness and fruit. Correctly made possessing the quaffing character. Long, juicy, mouthwatering finish. | 92

AH | Toasty notes sit alongside vivid apricot-yogurt aromas, and a spicy/sandalwood note on the palate. There's good balance and structure here; it's fresh and lively; but there are a couple of peculiar flavors. | 88

TS | First bottle strange, possibly Bretty. Second bottle fine and very impressive. Great combination of freshness and biscuity complexity, although a little yogurt on the nose. Otherwise excellent! | 90

Deutz Brut 2006 (12% ABV)

90

EA | Pale lemon. Overt, evolving nice, fresh white-fruit nose. A touch of fireworks and baking spices. Has character. Supple, round, and fleshy palate, with enough freshness. Pretty fruitiness, polished and comes with charm. Delightful. | 91

AH | Finely etched lemon-toasty nose. Delicate and youthful, with a steely core and no undue weight, this is an athletic style of Champagne.

Poise and cohesion persist right to the end. | **92**
TS | Soft, easy-drinking, typically 2006 fruit that will, if fresh, be fine for short to medium term. | **87**

Laurent-Perrier Brut 2007 (magnum) (12% ABV) **90**

EA | Lemon-green color. Lovely gunpowder-led toasty and brightly fruity nose. Vanilla, peach, and lemon, with a touch of floral complexity. Less layered on the palate, which is lightweight and fresh. Lean, with a long, fruity finish that is full of energy. | **91**

AH | Youthful, appley nose fielding some Burgundian sulfide (flinty) characters. Frothy palate and not a lot of finesse or depth of flavor; this is simple, rather coarse stuff. | **83**

TS | By 2007 standards in this tasting so far, this is mega-great! Fresh, vibrant, and full of energy, with classic lean structure and great intensity without being weighty. Smashing acidity, brilliantly fresh, citrus fruit. A lovely youthful wine that can be drunk now but should age beautifully. | **95**



Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Brut 2006 (12.5% ABV) **90**

EA | Pale lemon. Reductive gunpowdery nose, reserved with clean, fresh fruitiness. Some vegetal fruit tones, lime and hay. Tight palate, linear and lightweight, with lovely smooth, creamy mousse. Very correct and polished, and it comes with elegant fruitiness. Long, mellow finish. | **93**

AH | Quite pale and very fresh, fruit-driven (white peach, citrus), even herbal. In fact, it smells rather Riesling-esque for a Champagne. The palate is similarly dynamic, though it does also have a certain bitterness that robs it of some finesse, and the finish is loose, like 2006 white Burgundy can be. One of the few wines here that doesn't seem ready, but the drinking window might be on the short side, given that finish. | **89**

TS | Lovely youthful, pale straw color. Hugely reductive nose, but in a good way, and an absolute relief after so many oxidized 2007s. Some underripe fruit giving this wine its zip and zing, but the acidity is, if anything, a tad on the soft side, indicating a judicious use of underripe grapes. | **88**

Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut (Blanc de Blancs) 2007 (12% ABV) **90**

EA | Overt, ripe (almost overripe) fruity nose,

ESSI AVELLAN MW'S VERDICT

The 2006s clearly outperformed the 2007s for me in this tasting, which was somewhat disappointing overall. Out of the 17 vintage pairs we had, I preferred the 2006 in 14 cases (one pair resulted in a tie) with a two-point higher average score. For me, the only two 2007s that beat their 2006 siblings were Thienot Cuvée Stanislas and Franck Bonville Vintage Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs. Both are blancs de blancs, which is not surprising, since the year is recognized, if anything, for the quality of its Chardonnays.

Worryingly, many of the 2007s suffered from oxidative tones and dull, stewed fruitiness. Furthermore, even if the acidities weren't particularly low, many of the Champagnes greatly lacked tension and vibrancy, as well as overall harmony and finesse. My favorite 2007 was the Ruinart Vintage in magnum, which makes me greatly look forward to the launch of Dom Ruinart 2007, still resting in the house's cellars. Another great blanc de blancs, Amour de Deutz, also spoke in favor of the vintage's Chardonnay potential.

The 2006s were big, muscular, and plush, with an ample ripe-fruit profile, the finest being excellent but rather too many feeling overripe, heavy, or prematurely oxidative. They are generous and enjoyable today but miss the ultimate complexity and finesse of a truly great vintage. The finest for me was the Ruinart Vintage in magnum. Many blancs de blancs of the vintage appealed to me for their welcome freshness and nervosity, among them Amour de Deutz, Philipponnat Grand Blanc, and Taittinger Comtes de Champagne.

TOP WINES

- Ruinart Brut 2006 (magnum) **95**
- Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Brut 2006 **93**
- Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut (Blanc de Blancs) 2006 **93**
- Pommery Grand Cru Royale Brut Vintage 2006 **93**
- Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 **92**
- Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2006 **92**
- Castelnau Blanc de Blancs 2006 **92**
- Ruinart Brut 2007 (magnum) **92**
- Deutz Rosé Brut 2006 **92**
- Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2007 **91**
- Beaumont des Crayères Nostalgie Brut 2006 **91**
- Deutz Brut 2006 **91**
- Laurent-Perrier Brut 2007 (magnum) **91**
- Thienot Cuvée Stanislas Blanc de Blancs Brut 2007 **91**
- Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2007 **90**
- Franck Bonville Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 2007 **90**

with baked apple and apple jam complemented by a whiff of pastry complexity. Rather one-dimensional, direct nose. Succulent, high-acid, lemony palate with vivacity. Seems more complex and fine on the palate. Good length, full of fruit. | **89**

AH | Fine, lemony aroma with good depth and purity. This has a really consistent palate, mirroring the nose with balance and aplomb. The acid is nicely aligned with the flavor, there's subtle but persistent fizz, the finish is long and refreshing. Very classical. | **93**

TS | Fresh and tasty, with a touch of fatness mid-palate. Soft mousse, easy-drinking. This is one that will go toasty. | **88**

Ruinart Brut 2007 (magnum) (12.5% ABV) **90**

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Toasty pâtisserie nose with ripe fruit profile with appley fruit dominating. Light sulfidic gunpowdery touch. Rather light palate finishing surprisingly short after the promising nose. Dry, austere finish. Fine bite of acidity refreshes the ending. | **92**

AH | A youthful, restrained style, showing yeasty-yogurty characters on the nose, a little bit of caramelly development, a hint of buttered toast, but no fruit to speak of. The palate is taut, lemony, chalky, and very well balanced. In the glass, it reveals a flinty-Chablis hint of reduction. Yes, it's on the austere side, but the effect is intriguing, not forbidding. And the wine definitely has a future. | **90**

TS | Fresh and overtly fruity aromas from nose to finish. Fresh, creamy fruit on palate. Rich and yummy but would benefit from a leaner structure and more focus on the finish. A very good creamy Champagne nonetheless. | **88**



Thienot Cuvée Stanislas Blanc de Blancs Brut 2007 (12.5% ABV) **90**

EA | Promising, subtle yet refined nose, with bright, playful fruitiness safely on the reductive side. Lovely toast, cream, and melon notes. Intense fruitiness on the lightweight, silky palate with detailed fruitiness and harmonious, soft, supple fruity finish. Very elegant. | **91**

AH | Very fruit-driven (white peach) aroma for this style of wine. Soft mousse, soft flavor, though quite marked acidity. It's not a classic or complex style, but it does work on its own terms and offers plenty of pleasure. | **88**

TS | Light and fresh, breezy blanc de blancs, with gunpowder building amid tingly fruity and a soft, low-pressure mousse. | **90**

Beaumont des Crayères Fleur Noire Blanc de Noirs Brut 2006 89

EA | Rich lemon-gold color. Spicy, fruity, exuberant nose. Honey, hay, and a touch of sweet botrytis. Not bad but seems overdeveloped for its age. Mature aromatics and losing fruit on the palate. | 87

AH | Rich, developing, peachy nose. This really works; it has the body and power you'd expect for blanc de noirs but also a surprising succulence, which may be a vintage character, and entirely successful in this context. | 92

TS | Yogurt aroma, but delicious, focused fruit underneath. Would imagine this could be impressive in a couple of years when post-disgorgement aromas overwhelm the lactic (yogurt). | 88

Beaumont des Crayères Fleur de Prestige Brut 2006 89

EA | Deep color with golden hues. Sweet, ripe, marmalade nose, with baked apples and honey. Obvious and lacks dimension. Winey, calm palate with subtle mousse. Long with concentrated fruit but heavy-handed. Finishes sweet. | 87

AH | Despite some darkness to the color, this nose is quite clear and light, still with a fine, oyster-shell character. The palate is richer and broader but nonetheless continues in this fine, savory vein. The combination of succulent structure and poised mineral flavor could be problematic, but here it is cohesive. Excellent food wine. | 92

TS | Really attractive and quite complex in a sweet-ripe brut style. The ripeness of the fruit shows, though the structure maintains a classic leanness, leaking juicy, ripe fruit-pie juices at the edge. Fascinating to see how this develops. | 89



Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines 2006 89

EA | Soft, supple nose with caramel, spice, and some earthy and forest-floor tones. Round, almost oily sweet palate that is helped by the feisty, tart acidity that kicks in toward the end. Lacks finesse and layers, though. | 87

AH | This nose manages to be both eggy and muddy—not the best start. The balance on the palate between acid, body, and fizz is really good; it's just the flavor that doesn't seem to be well tuned. More focus and lift is needed to balance the lively acidity. | 85

TS | Starbright light lemon color. Yeast-complexed

RICH, DEVELOPING, PEACHY NOSE. THIS REALLY WORKS; IT HAS THE BODY AND POWER YOU'D EXPECT FOR BLANC DE NOIRS BUT ALSO A SURPRISING SUCCULENCE, WHICH MAY BE A VINTAGE CHARACTER, AND ENTIRELY SUCCESSFUL IN THIS CONTEXT

aromas on nose and aftertaste, with fresh, zesty fruit mid-palate. Excellent. | 95

Franck Bonville Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 2007 89

EA | Nutty complexity over the aging nose of yellow apple and apricot. Smooth, fluffy palate with elegant restraint. Carries on in a creamy caressing way, with enough freshness and fine fruit length. | 90

AH | A saline, oyster style of blanc de blancs, albeit with malty oxidation lurking in the background. There's nice drive, balance, and concentration on the palate, but the flavors lack a bit of purity and finesse. | 88

TS | An underlying freshness with chalky minerality and a little oxidation peeping through. Good acidity. Drink while it's a joy rather than keeping it too long. | 88

Franck Bonville Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 2006 89

EA | Lifted varnish nose with charred woody and molasses tones. Bizarre. Concentrated, oily, winey palate, with acidity kicking in toward the end. Clumsy and overdone. | 85

AH | Bright gold color but lots of Sherry on the nose here! Yeast influence aplenty, so more Amontillado than Oloroso. Lovely body and structure, with a persistent sort of crème caramel flavor. Satisfying but "out there"! | 86

TS | I love this one! A truly complex, profoundly delicious (if that's not an oxymoron) wine, with a mesmerizing (non-oak) vanilla richness on the finish. | 95

Deutz Rosé Brut 2006 89

EA | Salmon color. Pure, bright nose with lovely toasty depth. Succulent, with lovely smooth mousse, creamy texture, and harmonious nature. Delicious and fruity with elegance. | 92

AH | Evolved, malty aromas. Soft-textured, gentle palate; very beguiling, though not particularly rosé. | 88

TS | Bronzed-pink color, diffused aromas, and a somewhat fulsome character of fruit on the palate. | 87

Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut (Blanc de Blancs) 2006 89

EA | Expressive, fragrant, toasty, and fruit-packed nose, with fireworks and licorice complexity. Promising and has a character of its own. Lovely evolution. Rich, round, soft, and caressing palate, with seamless integration. Fresh, fruity, energetic, and long, all pieces in place. | 93

AH | Fresh, but with sweaty-yeasty aromas. Not a lot of body to contain them. All too lactic, verging on the bilious. | 82

TS | Lovely mellow intensity of yeast-complexed fruit. Rich, long, and focused. | 91

Philipponnat 1552 Rosé 2006 89

EA | Deep orange-toned color. Lots of Pinot power and depth. Vinous, fleshy, silky palate, with a touch of tannin. Structured, muscular, and fruity. Serious vinous style. | 89

AH | Attractive red-berry fruit decaying into autumnal, fallen-leaf aromas here. On the palate, too, the prettiness of the fruit seems marred by exaggerated toastiness—either through age or the inherent style of the wine itself. | 86

TS | Pale peach color, with raspberry-led red-berry aromas on the nose and lovely, delicate fruit on the palate. A classy Champagne. | 91

Ayala Vintage Brut 2006 88

EA | Deep lemon-gold color. Soft apple nose with cheesy tones, hay, and honey. Very ripe fruit profile. Round, muscular palate, on the winey side. Plenty of fruit but comes across as one-dimensional. Nice lightening freshness at the finish, though. | 87

AH | Good strong color and a rich, bread nose that offers a fine balance of freshness and maturity. A plumply savory style on the palate, albeit with plenty of acidity still on the finish. This is a pretty archetypal rendition of Vintage Champagne. | 91

TS | Fine pale lemon color; developed aromas on nose and palate. A joy to drink now but aging fairly rapidly, so it's best to drink up. | 86

Ayala Vintage Brut 2007 88

EA | Deep golden colour. Open nose with soft apple fruit with waxy layers. Clearly oxidative nose. Rich, ample palate with drying finish. The fruitiness is not pleasant and completely overtaken by its oxidative tone. | 84

AH | Bright gold color and a nose that similarly combines freshness with oat-biscuity development. Good density and definition on the

palate; not that much fizz, but it's a vinous style that doesn't rely on bubbles for its structure.

À point, I suspect. | **91**

TS | Nicely balanced yeast-aged fruit with a brut-brut finish, drying on an otherwise long aftertaste. | **88**

De Venoge Cordon Bleu Chardonnay Brut 2006 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA | Distinctly oxidative nose with bruised fruit. Toffee and apple dominating. Round, plush body with opulent fruit. Long, juicy, succulent finish. | **88**

AH | Pure, focused, and fresh, this feels like a very youthful example. It has green apple and slight yeasty-cheesy notes, all quite tightly wound at this point, but on the palate there is a certain pappy quality, a blandness, reminiscent of certain 2006 Burgundies. Inexpressive at this stage. | **86**

TS | Good fresh balance of fruit and yeast-aged complexity. Long and biscuity, with a creamy finish. | **90**

Deutz Brut 2007 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA | Overt, soft nose of ripe white-fruit profile. Gentle spiciness and appley fruitiness with toffee. Under-control oxidative profile. Fresh, fruity palate with soft mousse and good energy. Rather singular fruitiness and moderate length. | **88**

AH | Bright, pale straw color. There is plenty of lemony-mineral freshness here and a delicate but persistent bubble. The finish is a little on the sweet side, and there is more winemaking than grape character overall, but it's a good wine. | **88**

TS | Complex, post-disgorgement aromas dominating the nose, with baked-pastry aromas transferring onto the palate, which is fresh and energetic, with a sweet, ripe, mouthwateringly tasty brut finish. | **89**

Montaudon Brut Millesimé 2006 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA | Floral tones on the reserved nose with toffee-apple tones. Refreshing acidity brings welcome life to the palate. A bit one-dimensional with a light oxidative tone. Succulent fruitiness, though. | **88**

AH | The paleish yellow color belies a rather tired candied-peel-and-nut aroma. The palate bridges the two, with a balanced fizz and assertive acidity, as well as good body and length but also a certain bitterness. | **87**

TS | Very bright, white-lemon color, with creamy-malo notes on the nose and fresh, zesty fruit on palate. Needs a meeting of minds, and I think that three years' cellarage under perfect storage conditions should do it. | **89**

Philipponnat 1552 Brut 2006 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA | Soft, caramel- and vanilla-coated nose, with pastry and apple juice. Nice acidity, bringing life to the palate. Round and smooth-textured with moderate fruit intensity but missing layers. | **87**

AH | Evolved, dense, toasty; this is quite a savory and imposing aroma. The palate is then pleasantly

ALEX HUNT MW'S VERDICT

These two vintages presented themselves as close in quality; both fell short of the highest echelon, but each managed to field a handful of very fine wines. The styles proved different, however. There is a greater breadth and power to be found in 2006, on the whole, while the 2007s were leaner and more focused. The same contrast was to be found on the nose, with more aromatic restraint in 2007 compared to the open 2006s.

The actual spectrum of aromas, on the other hand, was more similar between the two vintages and depended on the state of evolution of the wine rather than the year. In fact, the main determinant of quality in each wine was how successfully it was evolving. We saw a surprising number of very developed, oxidized wines, as well as the occasional

example that was still too tight and hard and unlikely to develop greater harmony with further bottle age.

At around ten years old, the best Champagnes are rejoicing in early middle age: youthful citrus/apple aromas being joined by bready or toasty notes; fizz still present but starting to soften into the wine's texture; vigor and precision just starting to relax but with the sense of another ten years' positive development ahead.

Where we had both vintages of the same cuvée, the 2006 had the edge twice as often as the 2007, making it generally the surer bet. But both are years in which generally superior houses did outperform their peers, so on the basis of this tasting, it pays to play it fairly safe when choosing a wine from either.

TOP WINES

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2006 **93**

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2006 **93**

Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut (Blanc de Blancs) 2007 **93**

Ruinart Brut 2006 (magnum) **92**

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2007 **92**

Deutz Brut 2006 **92**

Beaumont des Crayères Fleur Noire Blanc de Noirs Brut 2006 **92**

Beaumont des Crayères Fleur de Prestige Brut 2006 **92**

Deutz Amour de Deutz Brut 2007 **91**

Ayala Vintage Brut 2006 **91**

Ayala Vintage Brut 2007 **91**

Cattier Brut Vinothèque 2007 **91**

Ruinart Brut 2007 (magnum) **90**

Jacquart Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006 **90**

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Brut 2006 **89**

Philipponnat 1552 Brut 2006 **89**

Beaumont des Crayères Nostalgie Brut 2006 **88**

Castelnaud Blanc de Blancs 2006 **88**

Thienot Cuvée Stanislas Blanc de Blancs Brut 2007 **88**

Franck Bonville Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 2007 **88**

Deutz Rosé Brut 2006 **88**

Deutz Brut 2007 **88**

Abelé Edition Limitée 2007 **88**

caressing—not sweet, but with a gentle bubble and roundness of texture that is an excellent foil for these more assertive flavors. There's just an awkward marzipan note on the finish that doesn't quite fit. | **89**

TS | Smooth is the common denominator here—from smooth, perfectly integrated aromas, to smooth, nicely developed fruit on the palate, and a smooth finish. | **88**

Thienot Cuvée Stanislas Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006 (12.5% ABV) | **88**

EA | There is a layer of mild oxidative tone over a toffee- and hay-laden white-fruit nose. Intense and suitable fresh fruitiness on the mouth-filling but not heavy palate. Long finish, with rich, flavorful ending. | **89**

AH | Discreet green-apple aroma, very neat palate—surprisingly so at 11 years old, so perhaps this will always be a rather self-contained wine. It's balanced but modest. | **87**

TS | Typically 2006 rendition of slightly fatter blanc de blancs. Citrus, pineapple, and mango. | **88**

Castelnaud Blanc de Blancs 2007 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Medium-deep color. Overt nose with caramel-laden red-apple fruit. Plush fruity palate with firm acidic backbone. It finishes a tad short and drying. Fluffy mousse and energetic palate. | **87**

AH | Both cheesy and vegetal on the nose—not especially appealing! The palate, too, is fresh but hard-edged, with high acid and a strong yeasty character but not enough of the grape to balance. | **84**

TS | Bright light-straw color, very creamy aroma, with notes of caramel leading to very creamy, yeast-complexed fruit on the palate. A rich, almost fat but very fresh and tasty, good brut finish. | **89**

Jacquart Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Sweet nose of super-ripe fruit, marmalade, and honey. A touch of oxidation with hay and earthy notes. Plump fruit on the round palate.

Concentrated, but it needs a little more freshness and finesse. | 86

AH | This is a fairly developed, malty style aromatically, though there is plenty of fizz and toasty energy on the palate. Quite lean and acid-led, it isn't a luxurious Champagne, but it does offer power and precision. | 90

TS | Developed aromas nose and palate; a tad fat with a touch of oxidation. | 85

Moutard Brut Cuvée des 6 Cépages 2007 (magnum) | 87

EA | Overt appley nose on the cider-like side. Baking spices, orange blossom, and marmalade but remains singular and obvious. Full and round palate, better than the nose. Lots of plush fruit but one-dimensional. | 86

AH | A wild, peculiar nose of dried peach and something reminiscent of solvents. It doesn't actually catch in the throat, but the aromatic character is rather Magic Marker. Frothy in the mouth, without much direction or autolytic contribution. | 84

TS | Freshly disgorged acacia aromas of autolysis still dominating. Needs another six months to settle, but very fresh and elegant with excellent potential. | 90

Philipponnat Clos des Goisses 2006 (12% ABV) | 87

EA | Soft, pastry and spice-toned nose, with baked fruitiness and charred woody notes. Good succulent fruitiness on the palate, which is lined with nice, zingy, lemony acidity. Long, with charred character persisting. Concentrated and fruit-packed, powerful but low on finesse. | 88

AH | This has a very nutty Amontillado character on the nose. It's an austere style, overly taut for the state of its aromatic development. | 83

TS | Lovely, pale lemon-straw color, with fresh aromas nose and finish, and light-but-long yeast-complexed fruit mid-palate and aftertaste. A keeper. | 90

Philipponnat 1552 Rosé 2007 (12% ABV) | 87

EA | Bright orange-hued salmon color. Sweet jammy fruit on the nose, berry coulis, leather and spice lacking bright fruity tones. Winery palate verging on heavy. Long and concentrated but lacking freshness and elegance. | 87

AH | Strange nose—spirity-sweet, like Pineau des Charantes. The palate is actually nicely balanced and fresh, much calmer than the nose, and with some gentleness and delicacy. A nice rosé, if you don't dwell on the nose. | 86

TS | Very fresh and tasty, but quite simplistic, with yeast-complexing barely showing itself on the finish. | 87

Cattier Brut Vinothèque 2006 (12.5% ABV) | 86

EA | Deep color. Ripe, soft, appley nose with honey, butter, and cream. Rich, sweet palate,

with opulent ripe fruitiness. Muscular and chunky. Winery and calm, and comes with little aging capacity. | 87

AH | There's an odd sour-savory edge to this wine, with tart acid and heavy dried-peach fruit unable to find a bridge in the structure or flavor that could unite them. Full-bodied, chalky, yet lacking in finesse, this feels muscle-bound and awkward. | 84

TS | A youthfully light color with the aroma of double cream à point and smooth, yeast-complexed fruit on the finish. | 88

Deutz Rosé Brut 2007 (12% ABV) | 86

EA | Medium-deep salmon color with a copper tone. Ripe, stewed berry fruitiness with a touch of spice. A mild oxidative tone to the fruit. Rich, sweet, fruity palate; on the winery side but comes with nice acidity and calm soft mousse. Quite mature aromatics already, but palate has energy and drive. | 88

AH | Pretty *oeil de perdrix* color, pretty red-fruit aroma—but something of old vegetables on the nose, too—a bit muddy. The palate is very dry, and this seems to emphasize the earthy notes. Not a great expression of pinkness. | 82

TS | Medium copper-bronze color, tasty plum and orchard fruits, some yeast-complexed aging on the finish. Good brut aftertaste. | 88

Philipponnat Clos des Goisses 2007 (13% ABV) | 86

EA | Deep color with amber hues. Overt, evolved nose, with red-apple fruitiness, cinnamon, and toffee. Comes with a lifted note. Quite winery palate, with moderate acidity and subtle mousse. Long, sweetly fruity, appley finish. | 87

AH | Deep gold color and an evolved peach-jam aroma, like an old Sancerre. There is still decent presence and fizz in the mouth, so let's say this is on the cusp. Drink up! | 83

TS | Fresh and soft, citrus and pineapple-fruit aromas on both nose and palate, with pineapple dominating a fresh and lively finish. A drinker rather than a keeper, but definitely a drinker I would drink! | 89

THIS IS A FAIRLY DEVELOPED, MALTY STYLE AROMATICALLY, WITH PLENTY OF FIZZ AND TOASTY ENERGY. QUITE LEAN AND ACID-LED, IT ISN'T A LUXURIOUS CHAMPAGNE, BUT IT DOES OFFER POWER AND PRECISION

Pommery Grand Cru Royale Brut Vintage 2006 (12.5% ABV) | 86

EA | Deep lemon. Fragrant super-fruity nose with floral tones. Lovely pastry tones, candies, and perfumy toast. Feather-light fluffy palate, soft and caressing, with an exceptionally fine mousse. Long, succulent, fruity and pure finish. Pure pleasure. Soft, mellow, and ready to be enjoyed, but comes with further potential. | 93

AH | Strikingly vinous and fruit-forward, with red apple, currants, and (benign) flinty reduction; this wine smells much more like ripe Chablis than Champagne. The problem is the fizz—not in itself, but in relation to these flavors. They would be wonderful within a Chablis texture; here, the overall effect is too dry and lean. It's a shame: a characterful, lively mouthful that is balanced toward aggression. | 84

TS | Some underripe fruit notes together with creamy-lactic aroma and a slip-slidiness on the palate. | 82

Jacquart Vintage Brut 2006 (12.5% ABV) | 85

EA | Pale lemon. Ripe generous nose with sun-kissed fruit. Spices and earthy-minerality, too. Fleshy palate with zesty acidity bringing an edge. More interesting palate than nose. Fine intensity and length. | 89

AH | Palish color, fresh aroma, but quite cheesy, not very pure. The palate is bright and nicely balanced (albeit slightly sweet), but that cheesy flavor dominates a little. | 85

TS | Pale color; looks fresh, but it catches at the back of the throat. Maybe a personal threshold thing... | 80



Moutard Brut Cuvée des 6 Cépages 2006 (12% ABV) | 85

EA | Deep golden color. Highly oxidative, mercaptan nose. Where is the fruitiness? Stripped palate of moderate length. | 83

AH | Gold in color and with a malty, evolved nose, this wine seems pretty mature despite the fresh acidity and effervescence on the palate. A bit simple and loose in structure. | 85

TS | Light color, developed aromas and mature fruit on the palate, with a soft mousse and notes of coffee and brandy notes on finish. | 86

Vilmart Coeur de Cuvée 2007 (12% ABV) | 85

EA | Fragrant, intense woody notes on the aromatic, powerful nose. Neither oxidative nor

reductive. Intense firm fruit and oak-packed palate. Chunky but refreshed by a nice acidity. Big, bold, and vinous Champagne. | **89**

AH | Very pale color, but a curious, rather thick, malty-apple aroma, and a very sweet-seeming, soft palate. It tastes more of cake than Champagne, not helped by a lack of effervescence. | **78**

TS | Elevated fruit, with high-tone oak on the nose, palate, and finish. Lovely pincushion mousse. | **87**

Mailly Grand Cru Brut 2006 (magnum) (12% ABV) | **84**

EA | Medium-deep color with peachy hues. Nutty layers over the yellow-apple and yellow-plum fruitiness. Touch of oxidation masking the fruit. Round, supple palate, with adequate length. | **86**

AH | Dull deep-straw color and a flat, stale nose, like cleaning out a toaster. On the palate, a bit of life up front soon reverts to this muted flavor, just leaving the impression of gas. | **78**

TS | Light lemon-gold color; fresh, creamy-lactic style, with a very soft mousse. | **88**

Abelé Sourire de Reims Brut 2007 (12% ABV) | **83**

EA | Overt, soft, evolving nose, with spiciness and pastry tones laying over apple and waxy fruit. On the oxidative side. Round, winy palate, with one-dimensional toffee-laden fruitiness but good freshness. Long finish playing on the lemony acidity. | **86**

AH | Bright gold color, but very evolved and malty on the nose. The palate lacks the zip to counteract this rather earthy cereal flavor, giving a clumsy effect overall. | **78**

TS | Interesting, complex, yeast-aged fruit, but a touch maderized-oxidized. | **85**

Moutard Brut Cuvée des 6 Cépages (magnum) 2006 (12% ABV) | **83**

EA | Scary-looking, deep orange color. Very sweet, evolved, botrytized nose, with apricot and honey. Still, an old-wine nose—hard to imagine it is from 2006. Full-on, rich, vinous palate that finishes dry. Curious but not bad, atypical. | **86**

AH | Very dark, amber-colored wine, yet not oxidized—instead, with a lot of botrytis character. A vinegary edge to the dried-peach palate does little to win this taster over. | **75**

TS | A deep gold botrytis color. A very curious but not unlikable Champagne. Rich, high-acid, extremely fresh, marmalade fruit, with a very soft, low-pressure mousse. Almost absolutely clean, with just a smidgen of VA that many will not even notice. A bit like, I imagine, a 19th-century sparkling Sauternes might have tasted. Deliberately and contentiously scored high ... | **88**

Cattier Brut Vinothèque 2007 (12.5% ABV) | **82**

EA | Amber-hued golden color. The fruit is autumnal, with toffee and vanilla dominating the slightly oxidative nose. Plenty of feisty fruit on the

THE PALATE IS CONSISTENT, MANAGING TO FRAME A SLIGHTLY WILD, CAREFREE FLAVOR WITHIN THE CLASSICAL STRUCTURE OF CHAMPAGNE. THE WINE IS ALREADY ON THE MATURE SIDE BUT HAS A LONG, TEXTURED FINISH

palate, nice freshness and length. Shame about the oxidative nose. | **85**

AH | This appealing nose has something of the outdoors to it; alongside the expected yeasty character, there are leafy hedgerow notes, even a bit of wild strawberry. The palate is consistent, managing to frame a slightly wild, carefree flavor within the classical structure of Champagne. The wine is already on the mature side, but a long, textured finish rounds it off nicely. | **91**

TS | First bottle toffee-oxidized. Second bottle also has an underlying oxidation, although obscured on the nose because of the acacia freshness of its disgorgement. | **70**

Mailly Les Echansons Grand Cru 2007 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA | Medium-deep color with peachy hues. Oxidative tones on the bruised apple nose masking all other fruit. Dry, balanced finish. | **85**

AH | The color isn't as deep as some here, but it is very flat-looking, without a hint of green. The nose, too, seems old and rather lifeless; the dominant palate character is of oaten biscuits. A strange, strident leafy bitterness on the finish is out of place. Pretty ordinary stuff. | **78**

TS | Another 2007 with a touch of oxidation! Not the villain that others are, and pale in color, but even a hint in a proportion of wines is a very disturbing phenomenon at this relatively early stage. | **83**

André Roberts Collection d'Auteur Blanc de Blancs Le Mesnil Grand Cru 2006 (12% ABV) | **81**

EA | Disappointingly oxidative nose. Autumnal fruit, forest floor, and spice. A packed palate with opulence and voluptuousness, but it can't rescue it from the dull nose. | **86**

AH | Dominated by bruised apple aromas, this is not a promising nose. Very dry, cidery, and rather coarse—it's hard to find much joy here. | **78**

TS | Too much oxidation in the underlying fruit. | **80**

Montaudon Brut Millesimé 2007 (12% ABV) | **80**

EA | Mild, rather muted nose. Soft and appley, with a flick of vanilla and fudge, but there is also something unclear about it. Bland palate with calm mousse and finish of stripped fruitiness. | **83**

AH | Fairly muted nose of citrus peel and toast—then an odd, granular sort of palate, without much fizz and with clumsy, oatmeal flavors. Heavy and tiring. | **80**

TS | Dull, creamy-lactic aroma building into oxidizing creamy-caramel palate with a dull, scalped finish. TCA? | **78**



Philipponnat 1552 Brut 2007 (12% ABV) | **76**

EA | Deep color with amber tones. Muted nose, on the oxidative side. Appley fruit with spiciness and waxy notes. Drying palate low on fruit but comes with pleasant freshness. | **85**

AH | Dull amber color. Little aroma; quite a nice broad feel in the mouth, with some texture and length but not a lot of effervescence or precision. Vaguely breadly flavor, balanced but not fine. | **82**

TS | Another oxidized 2007! | **60**

Abelé Edition Limitée 2007 (12% ABV) | **73**

EA | Deep golden-hued color. Highly oxidative nose, all about bruised fruit. Toffee and apple in a dull form. Firm, full-on palate that finishes super-dry, cutting the length. Lacks charm. | **80**

AH | Quite a deep golden color, and a fully developed, tertiary aroma of malt loaf. Richly flavored but not heavy on the palate, with a nicely balanced fizz, this wine is not complex, but it is satisfying. The finish is fresh and moreish. | **88**

TS | First bottle dark and clearly oxidized (50 points, faulty). Second bottle worryingly oxidized albeit less so. | **50**

Moutard Brut Cuvée des 6 Cépages 2007 (12% ABV) | **68**

EA | Both bottles deep amber and highly oxidative in character. Has maderized aromas, too. Seems very old, but there is sweet fruitiness remaining on the palate. | **78**

AH | Very mature, Oloroso-scented wine. A few fine bubbles and a bit of palate weight—but to be honest, it's had it. | **75**

TS | Oxidized! Both bottles. | **50** ■