

# REVIEW

## Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage: 1921–2013 Champagne that will never be forgotten

Tom Stevenson joins a very lucky group of experts for a once-in-a-lifetime tasting of selected vintages from every decade over the past century

I seldom accept invitations to join a press trip, preferring to visit where I want, when I want. And I never party. But this was a press trip like no other, offering the chance to taste selected vintages from every decade over the past 100 years—and yes, this time I did party, as fresh bottles of 1921 kept flowing! Who wouldn't?

It was my first and only trip abroad during the pandemic, and officially it all kicked off on November 23, 2021, at Moët's historic *Résidence de Trianon* in Epernay, where *chef de cave* Benoît Gouez hosted a dozen of us for lunch. I had sneaked into Moët the night before, when I enjoyed a one-on-one tasting of the entire current range in both 75cl and 150cl with Benoît, when the 2012 Grand

Vintage in magnum was stunning. But the one I kept going back to and asking to be topped up with was the utterly beguiling 2016-based NV Moët Impérial in magnum.

Lunch at the Trianon was, as ever, picture-perfect. The sautéed guinea fowl was a mini-masterpiece, with cinnamon jus and pomegranate, roasted figs, and rosemary, served with delicious, easy-drinking Moët Rosé Impérial from magnum.

After lunch we were whisked to a modest 170ft (52m) mound called Mont Aigu in the vineyards south of Chouilly. At its "peak," there is a tiny chapel called Loge Mont Aigu, and that was where we rendezvoused with Stanislas Milcent, Moët's environment director, for a

sustainability update session. We then headed for the Mont Aigu winery itself, which is not actually on any part of Mont Aigu itself but in a location known locally as La Goutte d'Or, with a view of Mont Aigu.

This is as über-tech as any winery gets, and being three quarters submerged into a grassy man-made slope, it is far from being a blot on the landscape. The first time I visited here was with the late Tony Jordan in 2015, when it was only half-complete yet very much in production. Its impressive plate-glass and stainless construction is a work of architectural and vinicultural genius, and what struck me most seven years ago is still the most extraordinary aspect of its design: a total absence of





any hoses, pipes, or people on the immaculately clean winery floor. Everything flows invisibly, whether coming into the winery, going out, or transferring between vats. The enologists flutter around like butterflies on the light and airy walkways at the very top of the vats, where they can plug their tablets into terminals to check in minute technical detail what is going on and make tiny adjustments invisibly should they be necessary. Any busy winery has a hustle and bustle, and you cannot have a fully functioning Moët winery that is not busy, yet Mont Aigu is calm and peaceful. Back in 2015, I was told that there was resistance from the staff in Epernay, who did not want a change of workplace, but as soon as they experienced working against a backdrop of vineyards in peace and quiet, no one wanted to leave.

It was at the Mont Aigu winery that Moët started to fulfill its promise that we would taste selected vintages from every decade over the past 100 years. That promise clearly included the 2020s, of course, but although Essi Avellan MW (also attending) and I were very used to tasting sparkling wines just a few months after bottling, Moët was obviously not comfortable opening unready fizz for the entire group, so what better way to start than with *vins clairs* of 2021 itself? Since these would normally be tasted between January and March of the year following the harvest, no one expected clear *vins clairs*, but they represented what was a pretty awful harvest riddled with mildew, so we were all intrigued to see what Moët could pull out of its hat to impress us.

No matter how poor an annual growing cycle is in Champagne, the whole region sits on such a climatic knife-edge that there are always places that outperform the rest—and who is better equipped to encounter some of those anomalies than Moët, the largest producer? With its annual output in excess of 30 million bottles (the entire LVMH group currently produces 50 million bottles and is committed to achieving 100 million bottles within ten years), a number of us were musing that there must be some exceptional wines to reveal—and we were not disappointed. It was a small tasting as far as *vins clairs* go, just ten wines in total.

Opposite: Restored Château de Saran at sunrise.

All photography courtesy of Moët & Chandon

## TASTING

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage 2013 Extra Brut (75cl)

38% Pinot Noir, 21% Meunier, 41% Chardonnay. Disgorged 2020, *dosage* 5g/l, 12.5% ABV. A lighter vintage than normal for Moët, but the fruit is so fresh and delicious that a 5g *dosage* is more than adequate, making it the perfect accompaniment to the sweetness of roast scallops, with Colonnata bacon foam, and black sarrazin blinis at Château de Saran. | 87

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 2008 (magnum)

37% Pinot Noir, 23% Meunier, 40% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. This vintage is more famous than 2009, but 2009 better suits the Moët style, so it is superior to the otherwise legendary 2008—in 75cl bottles, anyway. In magnum, the 2008 shows its true potential, making it the clear winner, even in the Moët style. In the larger, slower-evolving magnum format, Moët's 2008 sings with its reductively toasty aromas and typically lean, tight, and focused fruit. It is a wine of great class, with a long, linear finish. With a touch of sweetness on the aftertaste, you would be forgiven for not realizing the absence of *dosage*. A great wine. | 93

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 2002 (magnum)

26% Pinot Noir, 23% Meunier, 51% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. Fresher, softer, and infinitely more opulent than the 2008, the 2002 has a most sumptuous mousse, with toastiness emerging strongly mid-palate, where we find much rounder and riper fruit that opens into a peacock's tail on the finish, rather than the longer, tapering profile of the 2008. There is sweetness here, too. These magnums have decades to go. | 92

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1996 (magnum)

50% Pinot Noir, 5% Meunier, 45% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. The first magnum was corked (which was curious because synthetic liners replaced cork liner in the late 1980s), but the second was indubitably clean, fresh, and sleek. And unquestionably magnificent, with its very fine, high acids providing the precision for its laser-focused fruit, and never-ending, yeast-complexed aftertaste. A great wine. | 94

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1995 (magnum)

50% Pinot Noir, 10% Meunier, 40% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. Strikingly similar chords to the 1996 in certain ways, with its fresh and lovely acid-driven fruit, but fresher, less complex, and completely different in other ways. The 1996 might have the edge now, but both have decades ahead of them, and I suspect that there will be times when the 1995 will

have the edge. Indeed, I would not be surprised if this zesty and beguiling Champagne eventually ages more gracefully. A great wine. | 93

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1990 Brut (magnum)

50% Pinot Noir, 10% Meunier, 40% Chardonnay. Disgorged October 2004, *dosage* 7.5g/l, 12.5% ABV. Served at dinner, this vintage was no doubt chosen to accompany the truly inspired "warm salad of vegetables from the past," because its fruit has an element of mango that matches the mango-and-passion-fruit chutney featured in the dish. It is hard to believe that such a fresh and deliciously fruit-driven wine can be in excess of 30 years old. The 1990 is one of my strongest memories from that special day—perhaps because I drank so much of it side by side with the 1921 in the bar after dinner. A truly great, great wine. | 96

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1988 Brut (magnum)

50% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier, 30% Chardonnay. Disgorged 2003, *dosage* 7.5g/l, 12.5% ABV. There is a lactic element to this wine that was not there when I tasted the same disgorgement at my Christie's masterclass. Now, however, the diacetyl is clear and spoils what is otherwise a fine, deliciously fruity, tangy Champagne. Others may wax lyrical about its caramelized fruit, but it is a negative for me and denies this wine the percentile point required to make it worthy of 90 points. With a lower pH than not just 2008 and 1996 but than any vintage over the past 50 years, there was a lot of malic to convert in 1988, and here we see, I am afraid, the evidence of this emerging. However, it has had a good life, and its acid structure ensures that it is a long way from keeling over just yet. | 89

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1985 Brut (magnum)

50% Pinot Noir, 25% Meunier, 25% Chardonnay. Disgorged 2002, *dosage* 7.5g/l, 12.5% ABV. All the magnums opened were corked, which is odd, because the same disgorgement was fine at my Christie's masterclass. | NS

### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1983 Brut (magnum)

60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay. Disgorged May 2001, *dosage* 7.5g, 12.5% ABV. Served at dinner in Château de Saran, this vintage perfectly partnered a wonderful wild turbot, roasted tempura, and broth of Marne River nettles. It is the same disgorgement as at the Christie's masterclass and on even better form. It is also superior to the normally disgorged magnum of the 1983, which was sent in a wicker basket to journalists back in the day but was well past its best by the time I eventually opened mine. Never a regular release, 1983 was originally labeled "Cuvée 250ème" and was the result of the *chef de cave*, Dominique Foulon, being given the freedom to make the best Champagne possible without being constrained by Moët's house style. The first decision he made was to exclude Meunier, which had (even) less of a reputation in the early



1980s, and second was to include grapes from DP vineyards. The 1983 vintage in general was not highly rated by the wine press at the time, who knew less about Champagne than they do now. As soon as the CIVC announced it was a record crop, a number of poorly informed critics wrote it off as "diluted," but they failed to realize that it was only fractionally larger than the year before, which received their instant praise, simply because 1982 was a great Bordeaux vintage! | 92

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1976 Brut (magnum)

35% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 65% Chardonnay. Disgorged 2002, *dosage* 7.5g/l, 12.5% ABV. Despite its exceptionally high Chardonnay content, which many felt necessary in a drought year, I was less impressed with this vintage than a number of my colleagues were. Most 1976s direct from cellars are either superb, with exceptionally rich, often exotic fruit, or they are dead. But although concentrated and fruity, with attractive toasty aromas, this example lacks sufficient finesse due to its high-tone character, making it just a good 1976, not an exceptional one. | 86

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1975 Brut (magnum)

70% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 30% Chardonnay. Disgorged 2002, *dosage* 7.5g/l, 12.5% ABV. According to my records, the breakdown of this Moët vintage was 50% Pinot Noir and 20% Meunier. It has more complexity than the 1976, hence the higher score, but alcohol shows through, thus falls short of a 90-point score. | 88

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1964 Brut (magnum)

70% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 30% Chardonnay. Disgorged 1998, *dosage* 7.5g/l, 12.5% ABV. According to my records, the breakdown of this Moët vintage was 50% Pinot Noir, 10% Meunier,

and 40% Chardonnay. This is the last vintage to be partially fermented in oak and has always been one of the standout years in Champagne. It has such vibrant freshness, both in aroma and the vitality of its deliciously mineral fruit. It is the extraordinarily youthful quality I know exists in Champagnes of this mature age. It is why I came on this press trip, and I refuse to write glowing reviews of vintages that fail to stand up to the ravages of time, simply because they are old bottles. This has such a beautiful balance that its glacially evolved complexity is of exquisite finesse. A fabulously great wine. | 97

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1962 (magnum)

69% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 31% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, 12.5% ABV. According to my records, the Meunier in this vintage was 20%. It was a fine example that deserved its 90-point score despite some alcohol peeping through, but it was nowhere near as good as the magnum disgorged in February 2013 that was tasted at the Christie's masterclass. | 90

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1959 (magnum)

64% Pinot Noir, 36% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. According to my records, the breakdown of this Moët vintage was 50% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier, and 30% Chardonnay. No alcohol peeping through here, even though 1959 was the ripest harvest in Champagne's history. So ripe, in fact, that producers had to dilute it with low-alcohol reserves, something the authorities let it be known by word of mouth they would turn a blind eye to. It is somewhat ironic to think that one of Champagne's greatest ever vintages is, in fact, a Non-Vintage blend. As I was first told that by Dominique Foulon in 1980 while he opened the first magnum of Moët 1959 I ever tasted, when it was less than 21 years old, I think we can safely

assume this mesmerizing, gorgeous, and pristinely fresh example is a blend, too. Tasted *à la volée*, it is significantly superior to the magnum that was disgorged in February 2013 for the Christie's masterclass. Tasted *à la volée*, it always is. And it is almost always superior to DP 1959, because that magnum suffers from a flawed inner neck, which causes so much bottle variation. Moët 1959 is a wine of compressed freshness, fruit, and vitality, with huge reserves of extract and complexity that would be totally off-balance and unwieldy in any other year but somehow manages to hold itself together in a feat of balance that is close to miraculous. A great, great, great wine. | 98

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1955 (75cl)

70% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 30% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. From here on, there are no vintages in magnum format, only 75cl bottles, and all the bottles of 1955 were corked, which is so maddening because this vintage is an absolute banker almost everywhere else, though all my memories of those truly great wines are of magnums. | NS

#### Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Collection 1952 Sec (75cl)

62% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 38% Chardonnay. Disgorged February 2012, *dosage* 18g/l, 12.5% ABV. Might I suggest that Moët & Chandon send a case of this vintage to Queen Elizabeth II to celebrate the platinum anniversary of her accession to the throne? When released, this would have been classified as Extra Sec, but it now misses that category by a sliver (just one gram), and it is now technically a Sec. This was served at dinner with a fabulous panettone pudding (not panettone as such), Alba white-truffle ice cream, and it was an impeccable pairing. Such freshness and delicacy of fruit, superbly balanced, with a long and silky finish. A great wine. | 93

including three reds. Contrary to most of the others, I felt that Romont (no such village exists in Champagne, so presumably these two wines were from Moët's historic Les Champs de Romont vineyard in Sillery) showed more promise than either Aÿ or Cramant. I was out of kilter with most of the rest on the red wines, preferring the thermovinified blend to either the Aÿ or Hautvillers. This is a colorant, not a red wine as such. We are not looking for red wine qualities. We need to find color, freshness of aroma, and softness of fruit. The wines need to have an immediacy, not potential for development. The grippiness of tannins in the Aÿ and Hautvillers detracted from their *raison d'être*, though I dare say a judicious addition of either to the thermovinified red might

Left: Tasting in the Moët HQ cellars in Epernay.





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**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage  
Collection 1949** (75cl)

82% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 18% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. Normally a good year rather than a great year (like 1945 and, in particular, 1947), but it is my wife's birth year, so I have been privileged to taste many truly outstanding exceptions. This was not one. It is brown, brown, brown and stinks. No extra points for being old. | 45

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**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage  
Collection 1941** (75cl)

86% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 14% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. I have never tasted this vintage direct from the cellars of any producer and was astonished by its brilliant light color and fresh, zesty aroma. The structure is classically lean and tapers to a distant finish, carrying with it a delicately fresh, zesty fruit. This would be a revelation in a magnum, but it's a miracle in 75cl bottle. A truly great, great wine. | 97

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**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage  
Collection 1933** (75cl)

47% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 53% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. A chance to taste any 1930s vintage direct from the cellars should never be turned down, since most bottles were consumed by invading German forces or shipped back to the fatherland, but this dark, dank wine was a huge disappointment, with no bubbles and aromas of old cellar walls. | 60

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**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage  
Collection 1921** (75cl)

71% Pinot Noir and Meunier, 29% Chardonnay. Disgorged *à la volée*, no *dosage*, 12.5% ABV. According to my records, the breakdown of this Moët vintage was 35% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier,

and 45% Chardonnay. Although 1928 is probably the greatest Champagne vintage of the 20th century across the board, it is 1921, not 1928, that is definitely Moët's greatest 20th-century vintage. Like 1961 in Bordeaux, the "secret" of 1921 in Champagne was how the negative elements of the growing season conspired to wreck the volume of the harvest, while ideal conditions before and during picking lengthened the *veraison* and ripened the crop to perfection. Black frost occurs when the humidity is so low that the dew point falls so far below freezing point. This is why there is no moisture to whiten, making the frost invisible as it penetrates the plants so deeply and quickly that it has a far more deadly effect than normal. Between April 11 and 14, 1921, daytime temperatures soared to summer levels of up 82°F (28°C) and humidity plummeted correspondingly, causing the vine's metabolism to go into overdrive, pushing out sap and new growth everywhere. Then on the nights of April 15 and 16, black frost destroyed 80 percent of the potential harvest—but that tiny crop slowly ripened to magnificent effect. This was not my first taste of Moët 1921, but it was my first taste *à la volée*. The pale color and brightness of this 100-year-old wine in 75cl bottles is astounding, as is its freshness, without a hint of oxidation. It is so linear, with an amazingly long, tapering acid-line. There is no weight of fruit as such, just a vertical intensity that goes on and on so far that only Mrs Doyle could do justice to its length. The fruit is pristine, and there is even the prickle of a mousse that gently collects on the inside of the glass, even though it has had 100 years to escape and 3 percent of the gas has escaped before it was even poured. How can you not give a full 100 points to such a wine? I would ask any serious taster failing to score 100 points for Moët 1921, what more could you possibly expect from a 100-year-old Champagne? If you commissioned a winemaker to produce a Champagne to last 100 years, would you truly be disappointed with such a result? Could you even imagine such a result? Of course not. This is a 100-point wine. It is beyond great. | 100

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**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage  
Collection 1921 Brut** (75cl)

71% Pinot Noir (35/20), 29% (45) Chardonnay. Disgorged April 2012, *dosage* 7g/l, 12.5% ABV. This is the disgorgement that was served at dinner with breast of Ardennes chicken, albufera sauce, bolete mushrooms, and salty crisp chicken skin. It was every bit as fresh as the *à la volée* version, but more complete, with additional notes of slowly evolved toastiness, more creamy texture, and a silkiness on the finish. All three 1921s are fully deserving 100 points, but I have used plus signs to indicate my order of preference. Very similar to the February 2013 disgorgement. Beyond great. | 100+

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**Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage  
Collection 1921 Brut** (75cl)

71% Pinot Noir (35/20), 29% (45) Chardonnay. Disgorged February 2013, *dosage* 7g/l, 12.5% ABV. We drank this disgorgement in the bar, after dinner, bottle after bottle. It is the same disgorgement as my Christie's masterclass in 2014, and if I had been told it would be as fresh as this in another seven years, I would not have believed it. I used to believe that the older the Champagne, the less post-disgorgement aging required; and when they get this old, six months would probably be best and to drink all remaining bottles as quickly as possible, because they might last but will not get better. On the other hand, Benoît Gouez was always adamant that the older the Champagne, the longer it needed, and when organizing a special WFW tasting, he always preferred to give such wines at least two or three years after disgorgement. I'm sure there is a graph that shows I'm right for the first 30-odd years and Benoît is right thereafter. He is surely right here. Not certain I could tell which of these two disgorgements is which, and I probably rate this as my ultimate best because I drank so much of it in the bar! | 100++

be advantageous in a Vintage rosé, but that would just be a splash, not the whole.

Leaving the technology of Mont Aigu behind, we headed back to Moët HQ in Epernay and made our way deep into its cellars, where Benoît awaited us with quite the most exciting tasting experience we had ever encountered. Not the most ideal conditions to taste in, it must be admitted, particularly from the point of view of lighting, but what it lacked in technical suitability, it more than made up for in atmosphere. I heard no one complaining.

More than half the vintages for this amazing vertical tasting were disgorged there and then, *à la volée*, by Moët's most experienced cellar man Thierry Gall, who often opened numerous bottles of a single vintage before Benoît was happy

Right: Bottles at the Hundred Years Tasting.







enough for the wine to be poured. Magnums were chosen wherever possible, but the further we went back, the more often Benoît had to rely on 75cl bottles, and the more difficult it became to find good examples. I had Essi making studious notes one side of me, and Richard Juhlin playing his guess-the-vintage game on the other side. I felt as if the whole experience was being conducted more by Roald Dahl than by Moët & Chandon. Yet as surreal and hilarious as it sometimes was, it was a totally serious tasting, and everybody was professional in their study of each wine.

No one wanted to leave, but we had a dinner date at Château de Saran, where we had more vintages to taste and two disgorged versions of the 1921 we had just tasted *à la volée*. It would have been wonderful to have more time at Saran and to enjoy it in daylight, but it has to be said that, driving up to it, the newly restored château all lit up at night is a sight to behold. The first thing I noticed was that an entire wing had been demolished. Not that I ever said as much when I was a guest, but it has to be admitted that the wing was a bit of a carbuncle, and its removal has restored the château's symmetrical balance.

The first time I was invited to stay at Château de Saran was in the early 1980s, when there was always an elegant English couple in residence to welcome you, and after-dinner games included one where two guests in their stocking feet would balance themselves on empty Jéroboams of Moët Impérial and try to dislodge the other, each armed with a stick. (The trick was to wait until the opponent used his or her stick as a support by grounding it, then sweep it out.) The English hosts are long gone (fair enough, it's a French-owned, French-built château, located in France), and either French *savoir-faire* or "health and safety" has put paid to schoolboy games. In those early days, I would occupy a (very nice) attic bedroom, but soon after *Champagne* (Sotheby's, 1986) was published, I was upgraded to the Queen Mum's room! Following the renovation, all the rooms had changed, and hotfooting from Epernay, I found myself in the Louis XIV suite, which is very luxurious, if a bit dark. But the main problem was that all the doors, cupboards, and drawers blended into the elaborate wall coverings. It took me ten minutes to find the loo, which was nowhere near the bathroom! Consequently, I was last down for drinks

in the grand salon, which used to be the dining room back in the day. The snooker room has also disappeared. The whole château was completely gutted, with only the walls remaining, and everything has been beautifully restored.

As I entered the grand salon, I was immediately struck by Tyson Stelzer wearing a trilby hat. "What's with the trilby, Tyson?" I asked. "The dress code said evening attire with a touch of the roaring 1920s," he said. I replied, "Okay," in a less-than-convinced tone and was immediately struck by something else: a glass of Champagne all over the back of my evening jacket. This was courtesy of a lovely Italian sommelier and Champagne specialist. She was very apologetic, but I told her not to worry; in Tasmania they throw red wine over me, particularly when I am in a white suit. Champagne on black was fine.

After apéritifs with some 1920s music, we made our way through an expansive new walkway that has been constructed under the courtyard to what is now known as the *vendangeoir*. This building was never used as a presshouse during the 40-odd years I have known Château de Saran, and I must confess that initially I was disappointed at the thought that we





would not be dining in the château itself. However, its high-tech kitchen, the brilliance of the meal itself, and the ease of service left me in no doubt that the *vendangeoir* is the perfect place for dinner. I have attended a number of Champagne dinners presided over by world-famous Michelin three-star chefs, and while some of the dishes served have been magnificent, none of those dinners was without its faults, whereas the gastronomic excellence provided by Moët's Marco Fadiga, a "lowly" Michelin one-star chef, was to my mind almost perfect. No gold foil masquerading as culinary creativity here.

Following dinner, we made our way upstairs to the bar, where we were asked what we would like. "Champagne, of course! What do you have?" came the reply in unison. We were told magnums of 1990 or 1921 in bottle. Thinking that the 1921 must be the remains from earlier in the day, most opted for that before it inevitably ran out, but it was not the remains, and it did not run out. They kept opening bottle after bottle, so I happily alternated between the two. Benoît took off his tie to socialize, and we all relaxed after a long but not very arduous day. It was one night we drank Champagne that will never be forgotten.

### The Hundred Years Tasting

For ease of access, I have included the vintages served with dinner at Château de Saran with those tasted at the vertical in Moët's cellars. Where my Christie's masterclass is mentioned, this refers to a vertical tasting of 12 vintages going back to 1914 that I presented in 2014, when, as here, all the wines were sourced directly from Moët's cellars, with most being specifically disgorged for that event. I have tasted individual examples of several of the vintages in The Hundred Years Tasting, but the Christie's masterclass is the only comparable occasion when a number of the vintages had been opened together. Where the wines above do not meet expectations, they are assessed accordingly (except for corked examples) and not given some ridiculous 90-something score simply because they are so old. There are many reasons why vintages of such venerable age may disappoint, not least because there might have been multiple times that the cellars have been scoured for a particular vintage, and the visually most promising bottle or magnum (level, cork, etc) has long since been removed.

Above (top left): Chef de cave Benoît Gouez, with many of the world's Champagne experts.

That might be for an event such as my Christie's masterclass, or more onerous on stocks would be their use in the construction of special cuvées, such as Dominique Foulon's *Esprit du Siècle* (one third 1995 and 1985, plus two thirds 1983, 1976, 1962, 1952, 1943, 1934, 1921, 1914, and 1911). If we go back to the 1980s, I remember Moët having a special price list showing the availability of almost every vintage going back to the 19th century. I believe it had a restricted circulation to only the most prestigious restaurants in France, but that would have had its toll, too. So, all in all, there are a number of reasons why an old vintage can disappoint, but that is no excuse to be lenient in scoring. The grape variety percentages have been supplied by Moët, but I also mention on a few occasions when they differ from, or are clarified by, my own records. Different regimens, different numbers. At least they are different regimens. Some *chefs de caves* elsewhere have given me one number (not just grape varieties) one moment, then when I have asked a list of questions a year later, they have given me a different number. It illustrates how irrelevant the data can be and how notes and scores should be regarded as far more important. ■