



FALL 2023

CHAMPAGNE CLUB



THE TECHNICAL ART OF CHAMPAGNE

The latest edition of the Caveau Champagne Club will soon be in your hands– a twice-yearly exploration of some of the most fascinating sparkling wines on earth – Grower Champagnes. The wines in this 6-bottle shipment have been specifically selected to help educate and illustrate a particular topic– each shipment is essentially a Champagne seminar-in-a-box. You can use all of this to stage your own tasting at home, or of course you can just drink the wines one by one. This shipment explores the important differences in dosage–the very integral part of any Champagne winemakers task that happens at the time of bottling.



You're about to receive a total of six wines--2 different bottles from 3 different producers--a **Brut Nature** (zero dosage) from each, and an **Extra Brut** (between 0-6 grams) from each. Overall, this will provide you with a two-pronged approach to Champagne--first, by highlighting three of our favorite winemakers, and second, their particular winemaking technical approach when it comes to dosage.

If you're new to the Club, or would like to brush up on how Champagne is made and what all those words on the labels mean (like Extra Brut and Brut Nature), you'll find our Champagne 101 tutorial on our website under "Champagne Club".

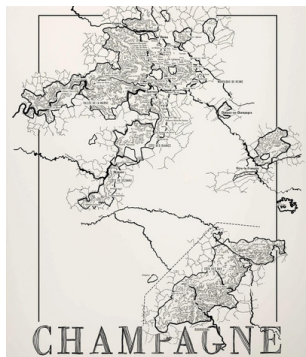
Enjoy!

FOR OVER 200 YEARS WE WERE FED THE NOTION THAT CHAMPAGNE WAS A WINE OF BLENDING AND WINEMAKING, AND THAT THE PROVENANCE OF THE GRAPES MATTERED LITTLE.

That's really amazing if you think about it. There is clear evidence that as far back as the late 1600s vigneronns knew with great certainty that wines made from different villages in the Champagne region were significantly different, and that some were clearly better than others.

The Grower Champagne revolution of the last 25 years - and yes, it has indeed been a revolution - has brought to the forefront the undeniable fact that Champagne is, when at its best, a wine of terroir. The specific characteristics of the place where the grapes were grown is of the ultimate importance. A great wine still requires great winemaking and great viticulture, but the quality of the raw material, and the intrinsic qualities of the fruit derived from its place of origin are the very core of what the resulting wine is all about.

The increased availability of hand-crafted, place-specific and personality driven wines - at prices that are a fraction of the mass-produced "Luxury Brands", is the other great thing that was brought about by the Grower revolution. We are fortunate to be living in the Golden Age of Champagne -the wines have never been better, the selection never wider, the prices never more accessible. Yay!



We are passionately pro Grower Champagne - but only the good ones. Not all “Farmer Fizz” is good - and in fact, the vast majority of it just isn't. The worst quality Champagne you're likely to ever encounter is probably a lower-echelon Grower bottling - some of which are downright awful.

Conversely, not all Négociant Champagne is bad - some of it is flat-out marvelous. Krug, Salon, Bollinger, Roederer, Jacquesson and many others are négociants that produce some of the finest wines on the planet. Clicquot, Moët, and many of the other “big names”, however, do not. As production volume increases it just gets so much harder to maintain a level of quality, and as such, those “mega producers” instead focus on homogeneity.

Equally as important - a larger production volume makes it more difficult to produce wines with personality or character, and nearly impossible to make a wine that speaks of a sense of place (especially when the grapes are coming from several hundred different places!) That's why we love and applaud the top larger producers who are making gloriously delicious wines.

At the end of the day - great, average, and poor producers come in all sizes. We specialize in the great smaller producers, who we think are making some of the most exciting wines to be found anywhere.



**WE EXCLUSIVELY IMPORT
GROWER CHAMPAGNE. AND
THAT'S IMPORTANT.**

Grower Champagnes are simply wines produced 100% from vineyards that are owned by the producer. It may surprise you to learn that over 88% of Champagne is Negociant Champagne – meaning that the wines are made with grapes purchased from dozens to hundreds of different growers from throughout the region, and produced in huge factories.

The big names that you are likely familiar with – Moët et Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Mumm, Taittinger, etc. – those are negociants. They produce millions of cases of wine, in an industrial fashion, from fruit grown mostly not by themselves, but by thousands of smaller growers across the 319 villages that make up the Champagne viticultural region.

Grower Champagnes, on the other hand, are made by small, family producers, growing grapes and making wines exclusively from their own vineyards. This is analogous to the small, family estates of Burgundy. The typical Grower Champagne producer makes fewer than 5,000 cases per year (in fact less than a dozen make more than 6,000 cases). There are over 7,500 of these small grower-producers in Champagne, but only about 300 of them are available here in the U.S.

It is fascinating driving around in Champagne. Every village has a billboard near the town crossroads that features the names of all the producers nearby. It is typical to read down those lists and not recognize a single name!





Brut Nature = Brut Zero = Non Dosé

- Each term is the same
- No sugar (dosage) was added at the time of disgorgement

Extra Brut

- between 0-6 grams of sugar added at disgorgement
- They're NOT all the same

Prior to a wine's disgorgement, when the crown caps are removed and the dead yeast cellars are evacuated from the bottle, a winemaker must conduct something called a 'dosage trial'. This is one of the important activities on any Champagne winemaker's calendar as it determines the taste of the wine that will be ultimately sent to market.

Trial dosages are usually prepared up to four to six months in advance, from Brut Zero up to as high as 12 grams, giving the bottle time to integrate with the added sugar prior to tasting. It is one of the most important decisions a winemaker can make during a wine's evolution.

We have been lucky enough to participate in these trials many, many times over the years, and they truly never disappoint.

The tasting is done blind, with only a letter or number written on the bottle, but with the actual dosage number hidden in the winemaker's notebook. One might spend about 10-15 minutes tasting, taking notes, reflecting, and finally, choosing their preferred wine. It is a difficult exercise because the final results often reveal that just because one wine seemed sweeter on the palate than another, it does not necessarily reflect the dosage amount.

These tastings are truly educational and fantastic to be a part of. They're very humbling too, even for an experienced taster. It could be that a wine with the highest dosage, that is—with the highest sugar addition, tastes the driest. Why?

Because the interplay with sugar and acid reveals itself in a splendid number of ways. Yet in the end, a winemaker is simply seeking the best balance for you, the final consumer.

CHAMPAGNE JANISSON-BARADON

If you ever need bad news delivered, you should want it to come from Cyril Janisson. He can make anything, and we mean anything, sound downright pleasant and delightful. Someone died? No problem! They made me laugh a lot. Poor health? Bah, it could be worse! Ha ha. You and your brother had such a large fight that you no longer talk and were forced to break up the family business, go your own way, and become a Champagne squatter?

What's the problem?! Let's just go for a walk and think it through. Hardy har har!!

And that, friends, IS Cyril Janisson's story in a nutshell. One of two sons of a well-known winemaking family in Epernay, with vineyards in the Coteaux Sud, and a multi-generational legacy. As of earlier this year, Cyril has ended up with half the land, a beautifully situated tasting room in the center of Epernay, but no winery. He actually uses the word "squatter" for real when describing what he's doing in order to make wine for the next year or two. Thankfully he has friends. And those friends probably dig Cyril's positive energy and light-hearted outlook, even in the face of catastrophe, same as we did. He makes wines that people use to celebrate, not wash away their problems (well, maybe some do), and he keeps this in mind at all times it seems.

We encourage you to look at Cyril's two wines first, because it is the dosage that is truly the only thing different between them.





CYRIL JANISSON

BRUT NATURE ~ \$39

EXTRA BRUT ~ \$45

Both wines from Janisson-Baradon begin with a 50/50 Pinot Noir Chardonnay base. The only difference is in the dosage. Both of these are from the 18 vintage, with Reserves from 17 and 16 added during bottling. It is a 50/50 Blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and benefits from over 4 years aging on the lees.

Brut Nature

- Bottled in February 2019
- Disgorged in March 2023
- Bottled with Zero dosage at the time of disgorgement
- Ginger, curry, and jasmine aromas
- Very high-toned and mouthwatering
- Lovely secondary flavors of brioche and white mushrooms
- As expected, a thread of acidity coursing along the jawline

Extra Brut

- Bottled in February 2019
- Disgorged in March 2023
- A 2 gram dosage at the time of disgorgement
- Fresh and elegant on the nose, with a very fine bubble
- Aromas of lemon/lime and aloe, some cardamom and ginger
- With some time in the glass picks up honeyed aromas
- Light straw color (from the Pinot Noir)

CHAMPAGNE PIERRE BRIGANDAT

We've been tasting with Bertrand Brigandat and buying his wines for a dozen years, but had only been at his house just once before, having been invited to a dinner in which we knew no one else, and in fact, hadn't even been introduced by name to any of them. We had simply joined the group at the table, and the meal unfolded. That was that.

On a pretty sunny November day last year however, the introductions came fast, as Bertrand greeted us outside and acquainted us with his new puppy, a big-pawed Bearnese something or other, that humped our legs a little before being remanded to stay outside when we entered the kitchen. Once inside we were introduced by name to the cleaning lady, who was busy putting her pine sol touches all over the place, and had the kitchen smelling like a misty evergreen morning. It was a strange way to taste wine.



In a room next door, an artisan was installing a new fireplace mantle in marble. We weren't introduced, but it wouldn't have mattered. His compression drill and hand saw were making a lot of racket. Between the noise and the smell we figured we would be ushered to a cellar, or another building, or even another wing of the house to taste some wine with Bertrand. Nope. Instead he gestured for us to surround his kitchen island, put out some glasses, and said he would be back with the first bottle. And that's where we stood for the next 90 minutes.

Did every wine smell like bathroom cleaner or deodorizer? Nope. Instead, we realized that the Brigandat lineup is designed to be a program that just goes along with the machinations of real life!



BERTRAND BRIGANDAT

BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT
NATURE ~ \$39

BLANC DE NOIRS MILLESIME
2016 EXTRA BRUT ~\$42

The Aube is Pinot Noir country, and both of these wines showcase the pristine Brigandat vineyards from the hillside of Channes, just a few kilometers from the most southern tip of Champagne before one enters Burgundy. (The only thing of note anywhere nearby is the village of Chaource - home to some great cheese.) The soils here are Kimmeridgian limestone - the same stuff found in Chablis - so the resulting wines have a beautiful minerality to them, and they are unlike anything else in Champagne.

Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature

- Pure Pinot Noir from the hillside of Channes
- A base wine from 2019 with about 30% reserves from 18 and 17
- Like all Brigandat wines, a very fine mousse
- Bottled in March 2020 and disgorged in May 2023
- Zero Dosage
- Smells like a lemon drop (the cocktail) on the nose and continues with the citrus theme throughout

Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2016

- From a 100% certified organic old-vine Pinot Noir
- 100% from the rich and robust 2016 vintage
- Five years on the lees prior to disgorgement
- A judicious dosage of just 5 grams
- A bright, brilliant light copper color leads to a wide palate of aromas and flavors
- Honey to black truffles to brioche and some sweet herbs.

CHAMPAGNE LAHERTE FRÈRES

Here is how our last visit with Aurélien Laherte went. After a brief meet and greet we hopped into his old land rover, or jeep, or whatever it was, and rode that tin can out of the village of Chavot and into the vines to examine a new Chardonnay vineyard he had recently bought. Anyone wishing to understand what it means to be an organic or biodynamic grape grower must visit vineyards during this season--between fall and winter.



Quality vines still have leaves on them, even 8 weeks after harvest. Well-tended vineyards have *engrais vert* (a cover crop) between the rows. Poorly farmed vineyards have neither, already denuded of foliage, and with nothing but mud surrounding them. Happy on the left, sad on the right. Poor farming really sticks out like a sore thumb in November. There's not even an argument.

This animates Aurélien. He doesn't suffer this kind of laziness well, and he gets all fired up talking about some of his neighbors, the corners they cut, and the prices they command. Yet he soldiers on, tending his vines like they are Chavot's own backyard garden, eschewing chemicals and herbicides, and putting some of the tastiest Champagnes we sell into the bottle.

For the last 10 years, we've commented that Aurélien is the new generation to watch. Listening to him espouse his commitment to quality and sustainable farming -- we think we'll feel that way for the next 25 too!



AURÉLIEN LAHERTE

BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT
NATURE ~ \$59

'LES GRANDES CRAYERES'
BLANC DE BLANCS EXTRA BRUT
\$89

With Janisson Baradon we gave you Pinot Noir/Chardonnay blends. And then with Brigandat, two pure Pinot Noir. So with Laherte it is obvious—let there be Chardonnay! Every bottling in the Laherte stable is delicious and well-made, and you truly can't go wrong at any point up or down the hierarchy. But these two Blanc de Blancs may be among our very favorites from our entire portfolio.

Laherte Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature

- A beautiful balance of liquid minerals, lemon-lime citrus fruit, and pure, hedonistic pleasure
- 100% Biodynamic Chardonnay from the Laherte holdings south of Epernay
- Bottled in February 2020 from a base of 2019 with an incredible 50% of reserve wine from 2019 and 2018
- Zero dosage at disgorgement
- As beautifully built as any Champagne we sell

Laherte Les Grandes Crayères Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2019

- Pure Chardonnay, from a steep parcel near the winery planted in the 1980's
- A really tight mousse, fine bubbles, and surprising richness
- One of Aurélien's bigger palate volumes
- Sort of makes us think of Grand Cru Chablis that happens to have bubbles!
- Bottled in March 2020 after six months in older barrels
- Disgorged in May 2023 with 4 grams of dosage

THE LAST DROP

Thanks for joining us on our exploration of the great wines of Champagne! Watch your email for information on our next Caveau Champagne Club shipment coming in spring 2024, and for pre-arrival offerings on all the yummy Bubbles and Burgundies headed your way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website: www.CaveauSelections.com

And speaking of 2024, we'll begin hosting tours again of Champagne in May or June. Please drop us a line if you're interested! orders@caveauselections.com