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Champagne Club! FALL 2017

Welcome to the latest edition of the Caveau Champagne Club – a twice-yearly tutored tasting and exploration of some of the most fascinating sparkling wines on earth – **Grower Champagnes**.

This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (and if you're not already a member, you can sign-up here: <http://www.caveauselections.com/sign-up-form>). Also, check-out our new **"House Wine" Clubs** if you're interested in a regular supply of yummy Burgundy at around \$20 per bottle!

The wines in each 6-bottle shipment have been specifically selected to help educate and illustrate – each shipment is essentially a Champagne seminar-in-a-box. You can use all of this to stage your own tasting seminar at home, or of course you can just drink the wines one by one. Whichever path you choose – there's lots of good bubbly in your future!



Magnums in the cellar, awaiting disgorgement

The Difference the Grape(s) Makes

This shipment is **an exploration of the different grapes** that Champagne can be made from, and how the wines differ depending on the grapes that were used. It's unfortunate, but most Champagne labels don't tell you the grape variety or varieties used, and it makes a massive difference. In this Club shipment you have examples of : **1.** Two Champagnes made from a single variety (one from Chardonnay, one from Pinot Noir), **2.** One made from a blend of two grapes, **3.** One with a three-grape blend, and **4.** Two examples that use all **seven** of the allowed Champagne grapes (yes, there are seven)!

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, you'll find my **Champagne 101** tutorial on page 21, following our discussion of the wines in this shipment.

Grower Champagne

We import exclusively, and this club features, **Grower Champagne**. 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 nearly 5,000 of these small grower-producers in Champagne, *but fewer than 250 of them are available here in the U.S.!*



A few words on Grower & Negociant Champagne

Yes, I am passionately **pro** Grower Champagne - but only the **good** ones. Not all “Farmer Fizz” is good - the vast majority of it just isn’t. In fact 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 Negociant Champagne is bad - some of it is flat-out marvelous. **Krug, Salon, Bollinger, Roederer, Jacquesson** and many others are *negoces* who produce some of the finest wines on the planet. **Clicquot, Moët**, and many of the other “big names”, however, are decidedly not.

As production volume increases it just gets so much harder to maintain a level of quality. 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 I 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 guys**, who we think are making some of the most exciting wines to be found anywhere.

The Grapes of Champagne

“Champagne Grapes” are not those small clusters of tiny grapes that you sometimes see in your local grocery store! 99% of Champagne is made from **Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, or Pinot Meunier** - either singly or in various combinations. Those three varieties are the “holy trinity” in Champagne, though as we’ll see there are four additional grapes still allowed to be grown in the region and used in the production of Champagne. These “other” four together account for just 1% of vineyard acreage, so are not significant in any substantive way - other than they’ve recently been somewhat re-discovered and are being used more visibly these days by a number of small, cutting edge growers.

Of the three major varieties, each one comprises roughly one-third of Champagne’s total production. **Where** in the vast Champagne region they are planted, and where they perform at their highest level is very different for each of the three. **What** they bring to the finished product is also very different. So let’s take a closer look at each of the Big Three, and then explore the four outliers as well.

Pinot Noir

It surprises many people that the most widely used grape in Champagne is **Pinot Noir**, which most folks know and love as the grape that makes the world's most seductive red wines. Yes, it makes fabulous red wines, but if you gently press out the juice without letting it get in contact with the skins - it makes a divine white sparkling wine as well. Pinot Noir makes up about 34% of all vineyard acreage in Champagne, and it is planted just about everywhere throughout the vast region.

Over the centuries it has been observed to perform its best when planted on the **Montagne de Reims**. The combination of soils and micro-climates there brings Pinot Noir to its peak in the Grand Cru villages of **Bouzy** and **Ambonnay**, though it shines brightly throughout the Montagne. The **Aube** region, which makes up some 23% of Champagne, is planted almost exclusively to Pinot Noir. This southern-most sector of Champagne is a touch warmer than the rest of the region, helping the Pinot Noir to reach full ripeness and its peak of flavors.

What Pinot noir brings to Champagne is **richness, weight, and depth** of fruit - often showing traces of red-fruit character typical of the variety (strawberry, raspberry, cherry). If you have a Champagne made entirely from Pinot Noir, you would most likely notice that it's weightier, has more body, and clearly moves in the opposite direction of the "apple & citrus fruit" end of the spectrum. If you have a spare \$3,500 or so, **Krug's Clos d'Ambonnay** is a spectacular example of a 100% Pinot Noir Champagne (and the world's priciest).

Chardonnay

The grape that makes White Burgundies so magnificent also plays a huge role in Champagne. It accounts for just under one-third of the vineyard acreage across the 319 villages that comprise the Champagne region, and you will find it planted just about everywhere except for the Aube, which is virtually all Pinot Noir (with one notable exception, below.) While it performs well just about anywhere it's planted, it achieves its apogee in the vineyards of the Grand Cru villages of the **Côte des Blancs**

Avize, Cramant, Oger and **Mesnil-sur-Oger** are the names of the villages that make Blanc de Blancs fans weak in the knees. Here, in the villages running in a line to the south of Épernay, is where Chardonnay with distinct and unique minerality is grown, and where some of Champagne's most sought-after bottlings are born. (**Krug's Clos du Mesnil** and **Salon** are 100% from Mesnil-sur-Oger, and are considered to be the premier examples.) Another hot-spot for Chardonnay happens to be in the Aube - the village of **Montgueux**, just outside of Troyes.

Chardonnay brings flavors and aromas of apples, lemon-lime, and a strong sense of limestone-chalky minerality to the mix, and can run the gamut from ethereal and elegant to rich and powerful - all depending on where it was grown and the style of the producer.

Pinot Meunier

Most people don't know much about Pinot Meunier (pronounced muhn-yay) - another red grape. In Champagne it is simply referred to as "Meunier" - they tend to drop the Pinot part. Likely because there is very little still wine made from Meunier anywhere in the world, it remains a relatively unknown variety. It plays a huge role in Champagne, however, accounting for nearly a third of all vineyard acreage in the region. Meunier has historically been regarded as a grape whose mission in life was to be a blending grape in Champagne, though more and more interesting Champagnes that are 100% Meunier are being produced today by the cutting-edge small growers (I especially love the **Laherte Frères "Vignes d'Autrefois"** - 100% old-vine Meunier.) Meunier is seen to do its best when planted in the vineyards of the Marne Valley, in the villages on both sides of the Marne river as it snakes its way through the middle of Champagne. Meunier has strong frost-resistant qualities, so it is heavily planted in the low-lying sections along the valley floor and near the river where the frost threat is strongest. There's also a section of the Montagne de Reims known as the "Petite Montagne" - west of the city of Reims - where Meunier does especially well.

Meunier brings distinct **floral aromas** and **creamy textures** to Champagne, and can also show subtle **herbal qualities** - all of these are characteristics that are not part of what either Pinot Noir or Chardonnay bring to the game. Thus it's a wonderful blending component, and an essential part of Champagne as a whole.

The "Other" four

The appellation laws still allow for four additional grapes to be grown in Champagne - all four of which have historically been part of the region and the wines for centuries. At various times in history these grapes were in wider use, and have come in and out of fashion. Trial and error and experience have led to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Meunier becoming the de-facto grapes of Champagne, but there are some interesting wines being made that include some or all of these four outliers. **The four combined make up less than 1% of all vineyard acreage in Champagne.** All four are White grape varieties - and they are:

Petit Meslier (pronounced may-lee-ay) - There are less than 50 acres planted in all of France. It is prized for its ability to retain acidity in even the hottest of vintages. Perhaps with the progress of global warming we'll see more Petit Meslier plantings ahead?

Arbanne - The rarest of the rare - it has all but disappeared, with only 2.5 acres planted as of the latest vineyard census. Historically it was used more widely in the Aube, and was noted as producing excellent wine in the late 1700s.

Pinot Blanc - Grown all over the world, it's a genetic mutation of Pinot Noir, and performs much like Chardonnay in terms of flavors and aromas. Once seen regularly throughout Champagne, it has dwindled to near obscurity now.

Fromenteau (froh-mahn-tow) - This is another mutation of Pinot Noir. In the rest of the world, it's called **Pinot Gris**. The Champenois call it Fromenteau, though it too has largely disappeared from the region. Grown all over the world, it's a major player in Alsace and Germany. It was at one time widely seen in both Champagne and Burgundy, and is thought to bring freshness, good acidity and crisp fruit to the wines.

Most people aren't aware of this, but much of what you need to know about a Champagne is not indicated on the label. Labeling information is getting better and better, but a lot of the labels continue to leave out what should be vital information – the grapes used, base vintage, date of disgorgement, dosage level, etc. I'm on a mission for full transparency in Champagne labeling, and things are definitely moving in the right direction. For centuries the Negociants did not want you to know what was in the bottle, as they claimed it didn't matter! Today's consumer knows better, and is demanding more information, and things are indeed improving. In the meantime, we'll always provide the most complete information available on every wine we import, and go even deeper into it for the wines that we select for the Club.

So let's get to the wines! We'll start with a gorgeous **Blanc de Blancs**...

1. Champagne MOST - cuvée Subtil

CLUB PRICE \$55



It's an amazing story - and we're excited to introduce you to the wines of young **Gaëtan Gillet** - who at the age of 22 became Champagne's youngest winemaker ever when he launched his operations back in 2010.

Gaëtan is one of the most enterprising young men you'd ever meet. While attending viticulture & winemaking school in Avize (the big Vit school for the Champagne region), with a loan from his parents he bought the ruins of the old Avize town hall, built in 1837. He and a buddy renovated and restored the building themselves and moved into it, and then began renting rooms to other students from the Viti in Avize. With the money he earned from renting rooms, he was able to launch his own tiny negociant operation when he graduated in 2010.



The renovated Mairie in Avize, now home to Champagne MOST

While in school he parlayed his internships with top producers in the Côte des Blancs into great connections for purchasing grapes, and with the 2010 harvest Champagne MOST was born. He says he chose the name because it simply conveys the luxury image the Champagne enjoys, and he didn't want to put his name on a label just yet. He borrowed space in wineries of various friends, and made some beautiful wines right out of the gate. He then devised to sell his wines at one of the most popular Christmas markets in Reims, and went on to practically sell-out the entirety of his first cuvée in the weeks leading up to the holidays in 2013.

With the profits earned from selling that first cuvée, and subsequent Christmas market sales the following years, he was able to start purchasing minuscule vineyard parcels in the Grand Cru villages of Cramant, Avize, Oger, Vertus, and Mesnil-sur-Oger. He now has nine tiny parcels that all together add up to just one hectare - about 2.5 acres.

Going forward, the brand MOST will continue as a small negociant label for wines he makes from purchased grapes, but the focus will be on his new, not-yet named brand for the wines from his estate parcels. There will be two wines from the '13 vintage, eight different wines from 2014, and from '15 there will be nine different wines under the new label - all single parcel wines, all vinified 100% in barrel, all fermented with wild yeasts, and all with minimal dosage. The wines will be released after several years in the bottle - typically 5-7 years on the lees.



Gaetan Gillet

Not one to stand still for long, Gaëtan has purchased the old abandoned **Mumm** production facility in Avize, which he has renovated and moved into for production this fall. Whew!

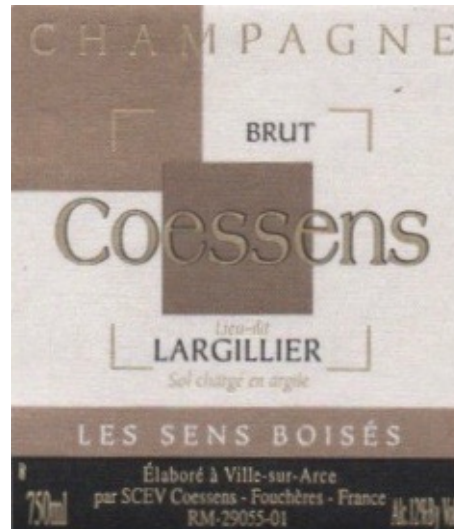
The **Cuvée Subtil** (*soob-teeel*) is an auspicious start, and an indication of more great things to come. We're honored to bring Club members a first look at one of Champagne's newest rising stars.

- 100% from the 2010 harvest
- 100% Grand Cru Chardonnay from Mesnil-sur-Oger and Oger
- Primary fermentation in used Burgundy barrels
- Over 5 years on the lees in bottle prior to disgorgement
- Dosage 2g/l - Disgorged July 2016
- 200 cases produced

I fell in love with this wine at first sip. It's a gorgeous combination of intense minerality and rich fruit, with distinct notes of orange peel and lemon-lime. This is everything I love about a great Blanc de Blancs, and a fine example of what Chardonnay does on its own. Blind, I never would have guessed it at only 2 grams of dosage - the ripe fruit is in full effect, and the limestone salinity is laser-pure.

2. Champagne Coessens - les Sens Boisés

CLUB PRICE \$65

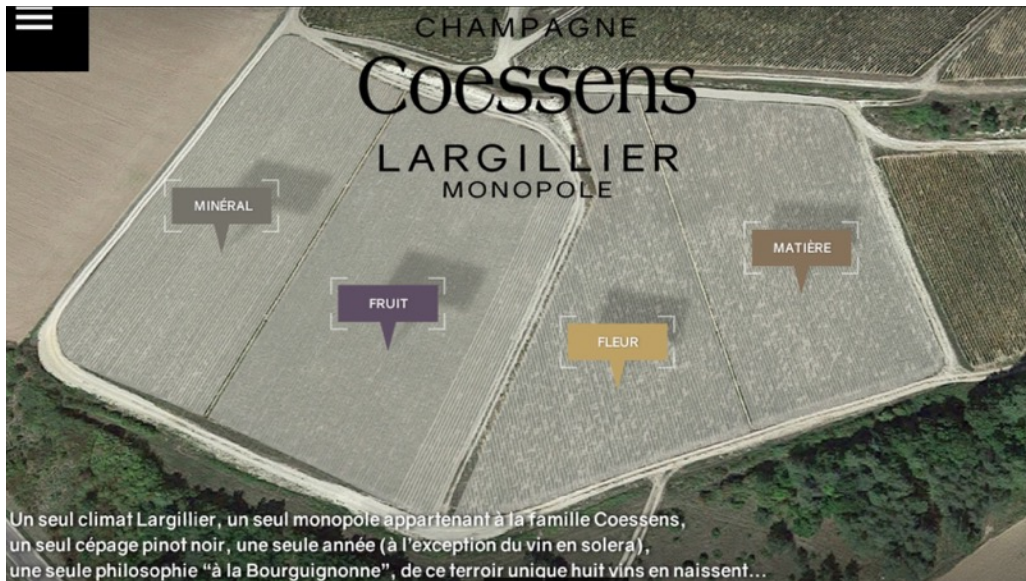


We've featured a number of bottling from Jérôme Coessens in previous Club packages, but this is the first time for **Les Sens Boisés** - the only bottling of his that is barrel fermented (thus the name - which essentially translates as "In the wooden direction", or "in a wooden sense"). Don't expect any true wood influence on the wine - he uses all older, neutral barrels - in this case barrels that were used 6 times or more in Burgundy before he gets them. Thus there is no "woody" impression on the wine, but barrel fermentation allows the wine to micro-oxygenate, and it takes on different textures and aromas than wines fermented in stainless-steel tanks, an oxygen-free environment.

All of Jérôme's wines are from his single 5-acre vineyard, ***l'Argillier***, in the village of Ville-sur-Arce in the far southern reaches of the Aube. So here we have an example of a **100% Pinot Noir Champagne**, and an excellent illustration of the power, weight, and richness that Pinot brings to Champagne. Like the man himself, the Coessens wines are not shy, but big, bold expressions of their unique place of origin.

He's done intense geological studies of his vineyard, resulting in the discovery of four different terroirs within the one 5-acre parcel - which you can see designated here below -

The fruit for **Les Sens Boisés** is all from the "*Matière*" section at the top of the vineyard, which is dominated by rich clay soils and produces the most voluptuous wines from the parcel.



- 100% Pinot Noir
- 100% from the 2009 harvest
- Primary fermentation in used Burgundy barrels
- Six years on the lees in bottle
- 6 grams dosage
- Disgorged May, 2016
- 166 cases produced

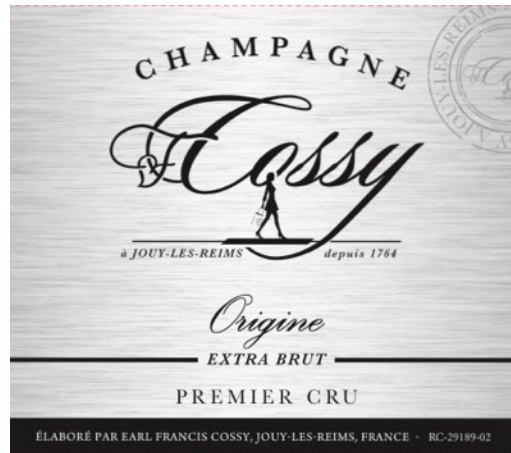
Voluptuous indeed! It shows a rich, honeyed, slightly smokey nose, some nice spice notes, and ripe white peaches on the palate, with a mineral and saline finish that pulls it all together beautifully.



Jérôme Coessens

3. **Origine Extra-Brut** – Champagne F. Cossy

CLUB PRICE \$39



Throughout much of the 20th century, it was standard practice for a lot of non-vintage champagnes to be made from equal parts of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Meunier. **Sophie Cossy's** father Francis adhered to this “one-third of each” formula for most of his cuvées throughout his career. Sophie took over production when her dad passed unexpectedly some 10 years ago, and has since modified the domaine’s approach a bit, including adding a Blanc de Blancs to the lineup in recent years. For her non-vintage wines, she still uses all three major grapes, but now varies the proportions depending on the vintage and the characteristics of each variety that year. Her vineyards are all in the adjoining villages of Jouy-lès-Reims and Pargny-lès-Reims on the “Petit Montagne” - an area where all three grapes tend to perform very well, and it’s especially good for Meunier.

- 75% from the 2009 vintage, with 25% reserve wines from 2008 & 2007
- 40% Meunier, 35% Pinot Noir, and 25% Chardonnay
- Fermented in stainless steel tank
- Disgorged March 2016 – over 6 years on the lees
- Dosage – 4 g/l
- 300 cases produced

Here we have a “classic” Champagne blend of all three grapes, though historically it was rare to have a predominance of Meunier. The Meunier brings the lovely floral aspect to the nose, and helps keep the wine light and ethereal - a much more delicate expression than the Coessens wine before it. It shows

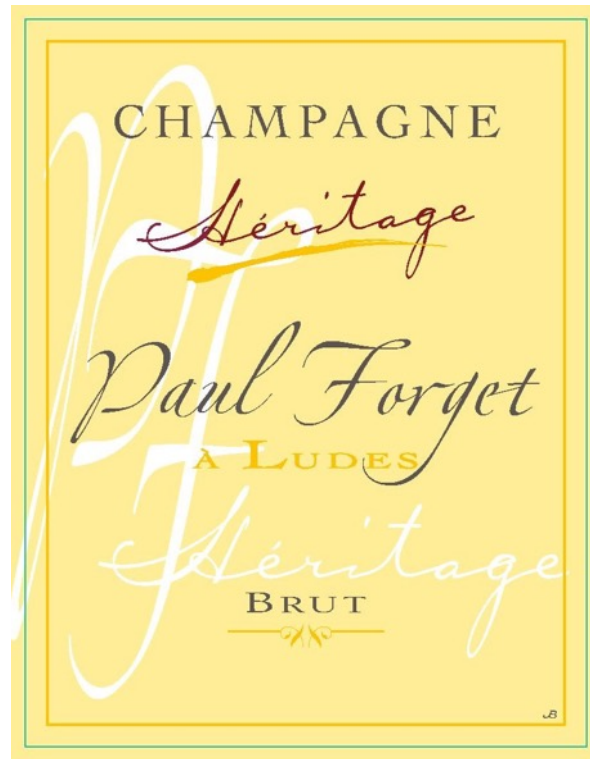
flavors of both grapefruit and ripe peaches - a nice balance and a very complex wine. (FYI - this is essentially the same base blend we use for our **Caveau Extra-Brut**, but the dosage is lower for our version - 2.4 grams for the current release.)



In the tasting lab with Sophie Cossy

4. **Héritage Paul Forget** – Forget-Chemin

CLUB PRICE \$40



4th-generation winemaker Thierry Forget owns 30 acres of vines spread across 60+ parcels in 10 different villages, covering virtually all sectors of Champagne except the Côte des Blancs. He grows all three major grapes, but Meunier makes up the lion's share at nearly 70% of his acreage. He has a large and varied palate to work with when making his blends, and typically uses a very large percentage of reserve wines in his non-vintage cuvées. He currently has reserve wines from every vintage going back to 2000 in the cellar, and the older wines can make up to 70% of the blend of his basic cuvées.

Every year he makes a wine called **Héritage - Paul Forget**, named after his grandfather (and his son as well.) For this cuvée Thierry experiments every year - there is no preconceived notion as to what it is supposed to be. It can be all Chardonnay one year, a three-grape blend the next, and can be sourced from anywhere among his vast vineyard holdings. Essentially, he picks wines that he finds especially interesting ever year for this cuvée, and enjoys being able to flex his creative muscle a bit.

You may have had a “*Heritage - Paul Forget*” wine previously, but you haven’t had this one - it’s totally different every year.

- 100% from the 2013 vintage
- 62% Pinot Noir, 38% Chardonnay from estate parcels on the Montagne de Reims
- Fermented in stainless-steel tank
- Another 2.5 years on the lees in bottle
- Dosage 8 g/l – Disgorged September 2016
- 175 cases produced

So here we see a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, all from the powerful terroirs of the Montagne de Reims. I chose this one to illustrate what happens when you combine the darker, red-tinged fruit of the Pinot with the citrus and apple world of the Chardonnay - and it’s a beautiful thing. Very complete and complex, it’s a winemaker’s idea of what he thought were the most interesting characteristics of the vintage. Yummy stuff indeed!



Thierry Forget



Cyril Jansson and his brother **Maxence**, 5th-generation vigneron, have taken what was an old-school, under the radar negociant and turned it into a forward-thinking modern domaine. They're based in the heart of Épernay, just a block from the famed "Avenue de Champagne", home to Moët, Pol Roger, Perrier-Jouet and more of the mega-negociants. We introduced you to the delicious Janisson-Baradon wines in 2016. This year, they've introduced us to something very exciting.

Their 22.5-acres of vineyard parcels are all on the hillsides surrounding Épernay, and they grow all three major grapes, or at least they did until a few years back. Cyril decided to explore the viability of all four of the heritage varieties still allowed, and discovered that they all did well on their estate sites, so now they are one of only a small handful of producers to work with all seven grapes.

We're stoked to be the only importer (to our knowledge) able to offer **two** Champagnes made from all seven allowed grape varieties. Welcome to the debut release of the Janisson-Baradon **7C**. The "**C**" is for Cépages, the french word for grape variety. There are 6 other "**C**" words on their label as well - Coeur (heart), Coteaux (hillsides), Celebration, Collection, Charme, and Creation.

- 17% Pinot Noir, 15% Meunier, 18% Chardonnay, 11% Petit Meslier, 12% Arbanne, 13% Fromenteau, 14% Pinot Blanc
- 100% from 2013 harvest, vinified in tank (%) and barrel (%)
- Dosage 2.5 grams/liter
- 3 years on the lees, disgorged March 2017. Only 100 cases produced

I was floored the first time I tasted this - it's an incredibly complex wine, with fruit, flowers, citrus, herbs, bread dough and limestone all showing through distinctly. It's a kaleidoscope of flavors and aromas, and seems to show something different on nearly every sip. Try it in an assortment of different stemware and see how it takes on very different characters in a variety of glass shapes - absolutely fascinating.



Cyril Janisson

6. Les 7 - Laherte Frères

CLUB PRICE \$75



Aurélien Laherte, though still just past 30, has become a role-model for the younger generation of grower-producers in Champagne. His moves toward cutting-edge viticulture and winemaking have brought the estate to the forefront, and Laherte has become one of the most respected producers in the region.

Biodynamic farming, barrel-fermentation, and a willingness to push the boundaries and experiment - all of these combine to make the Laherte wines modern benchmarks. It was this willingness to experiment, and a reverence for Champagne's deep history, that brought about the cuvée simply called "**Les 7**" (For the first three releases this wine was called "Les Clos", after the single vineyard parcel it comes from. It was subsequently changed to Les 7 to more accurately reflect the uniqueness of the 7-variety blend.)

Aurélien and his dad Thierry discovered some random vines of the "other" varieties growing in some of their parcels, and decided to create a vineyard that would recreate the Champagne of 250 years ago. So, in 2003, on a hillside behind his grandmother's house high on the slope of Chavot, they planted a small .66-acre plot with all seven allowed varieties.

- 14% Pinot Noir, 18% Chardonnay, 18% Meunier, 10% Fromenteau, 8% Arbanne, 17% Pinot Blanc, 15% Petit Meslier (these are the percentages of actual vines in the parcel, the resulting yields may differ)
- This is a blend of 60% from the 2013 harvest, and 40% from a perpetual solera blend of reserve wines from 2005-2013

- Barrel fermented in used Burgundy barrels, malolactic fermentation was blocked. Disgorged January 2016, dosage 4 g/l
- 75 cases produced

In a word, wow! Unlike any other Champagne, period - including the 7C from Janisson-Baradon (the main differences would be the terroir, and vine age - the Laherte vines being a bit older.) This is a very ethereal, elegant, refined Champagne, The explosive and complex flavors are held together by a beautiful acidity, and the low dosage level seems a perfect match for the cascade of fruits and minerals that dance across the palate. I love the herbal elements from the Arbane and Petit Meslier - they're nicely integrated into the whole. An absolutely unique and immensely delicious Champagne. Cheers!



Aurélien Laherte

Next shipment in the Spring...

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 the spring, and for pre-arrival offerings on all the yummy Bubblics headed your way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website: www.caveauselections.com

Please let us know if we need to make any changes to your account. Email us at hellocaveau@gmail.com or text or WhatsApp us at 503-679-6233 if:

- You have a new or updated credit card
- You have a change of billing or shipping address
- You want to change your order from “ship” to “pick-up”, or vice-versa
- You have any questions about your Club membership

*Launched in 2005, **Caveau Selections** is owned and operated by Martha & Scott Wright, the founders and former owners of top Oregon Pinot Noir producer Scott Paul Wines. Scott has been drinking and studying the wines and regions of Burgundy and Champagne since the 1970s, and visiting regularly since the 1980s. He leads annual Insiders' Tours of both Burgundy and Champagne, and teaches seminars here and abroad. He is available to teach private seminars and conduct tutored tastings for your group – email Scott@caveauselections.com for more information.*

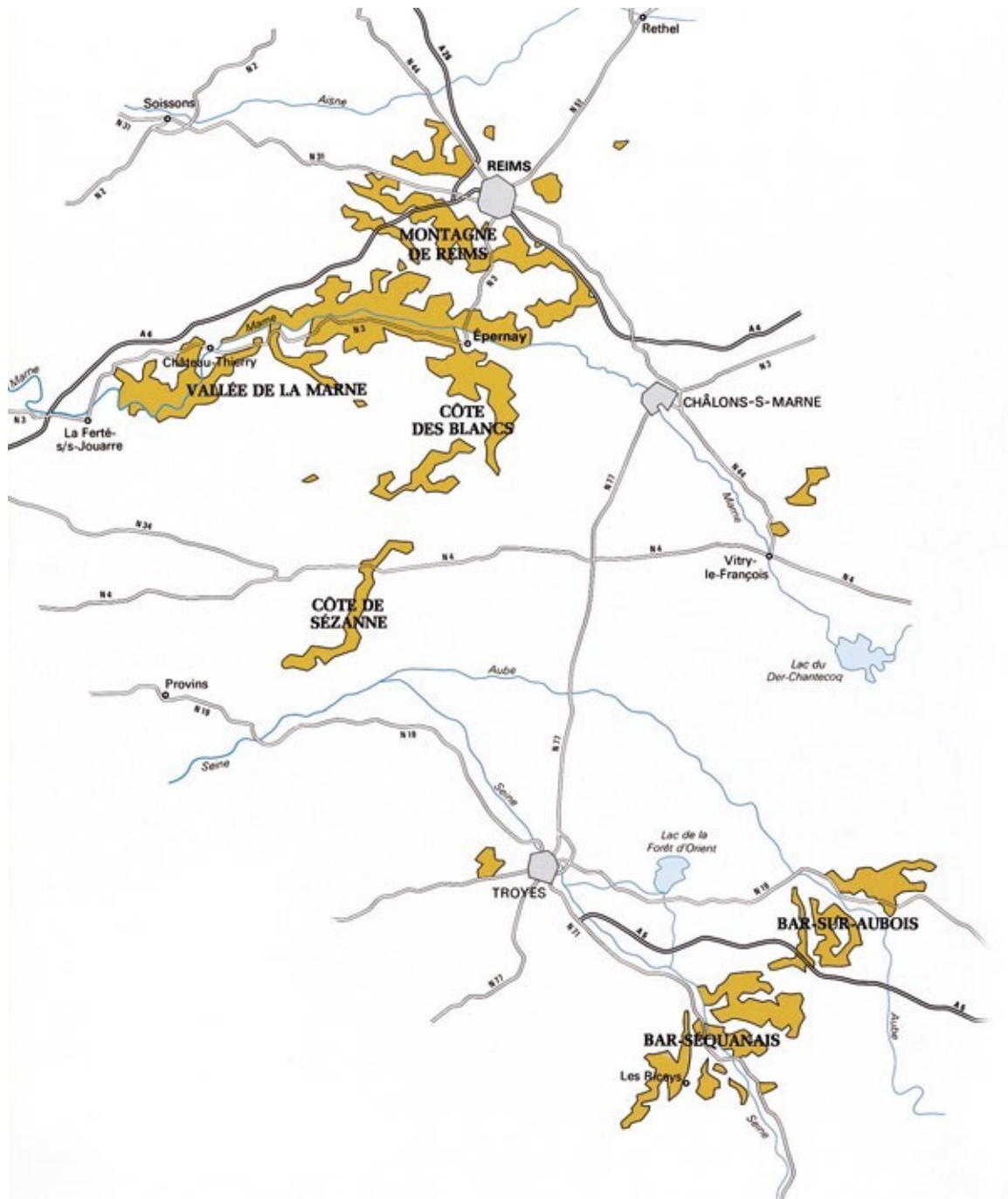
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Read on for our complete Champagne 101 tutorial on the following pages...

Champagne 101

- Champagne is the largest AOC (**A**ppellation d'**O**rigine **C**ontrôlée) in France. It covers a whopping 76,000 acres of vineyards, across 319 small villages and towns. Only wine made from this delimited area can be called Champagne. Sparkling wine made from other regions in France carries the appellation *Crémant*.
- There are nearly 20,000 vineyard owners in Champagne. Only about 5,000 of them produce wine from the grapes they grow. The other 15,000 sell all of their grapes to the large negociant houses.
- There are five distinct sub-regions of Champagne:
- **Montagne de Reims** – Encompasses several villages surrounding the city of Reims (pronounced “Rance”). Pinot Noir is the predominant grape grown here, but there is significant Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier as well.
- **Vallée de la Marne** – Many villages strung along the Marne river, which cuts across Champagne from East to West. The largest percentage of acreage is planted to Pinot Meunier.
- **Côte des Blancs** – As the name suggests, this is white grape territory. Virtually everything in this sub-region is Chardonnay.
- **Côte de Sezanne** – A region on the rise. All three grapes are grown here.
- **The Aube (or the Côte des Bar)** – An area on the rise, with a new generation of quality-focused growers emerging. This is where much of the most exciting, cutting-edge Champagne is coming from.
The first three regions listed above account for the vast majority of Champagne production, though the Côte de Sezanne and the Aube are growing rapidly.

Below is a map with a good overview of the entirety of the Champagne appellation.



- **Vineyard classification** is radically different in Champagne than in Burgundy. In Burgundy, it is each individual piece of vineyard land that is classified. In Champagne, the *entire village* is classified – every vineyard within the boundaries of a village is given the same classification (though in fact certain sites within the village are clearly better than others, so this is a seriously imperfect system).

- Each village was historically given a numerical rating, on a scale of 100 percentage points. Champagne village ratings are as follows:
- **Grand Cru** – Villages rated 100%
- **Premier Cru** – Villages rated 90-99%
- **Deuxième Cru** - Villages rated 80-89%

There are only 17 Grand Cru villages. The most familiar names among them would be *Bouzy*, *Ambonnay*, *Oger*, and *le Mesnil-sur-Oger*.

The percentage points refer to the price paid for grapes from each village by the negociants. Say the top-line price for a ton of Pinot Noir is set at \$4,000 for this vintage. If you were selling grapes from a vineyard in a Grand Cru village, you would receive 100% of that price, the full \$4,000. If you were selling grapes from a Premier Cru village rated at 95%, you would receive 95% of the top price, or \$3,800 in this case. **(This system has been officially discontinued, but in practice things remain pretty much the same.)**

There are three main grape varieties grown in Champagne:

Pinot Noir – which accounts for 37.5% of all plantings

Chardonnay – which accounts for 27.5%

Pinot Meunier – which accounts for 35%

- Additionally, there are four “other” grapes allowed in Champagne, but they are rarely seen today. They are – *Fromenteau*, *Petit Meslier*, *Arbanne*, and *Pinot Blanc*
- Pinot Meunier is a grape little seen outside of Champagne. It is extremely valuable as a blending grape, and adds lovely aromatics and light-bodied fruit to the wines, but is not often used on its own, neither in Champagne nor in still wine.
- Most Champagne is a blend of two or more of the varieties, though some are made from only one of the grape varieties.
- There are **four** main categories of wine in Champagne –

- **“Champagne”** – made from a blend of two or three of the grape varieties, using both colors – i.e. Chardonnay and at least one of the two Pinot varieties
- **“Blanc de Blancs”** – made exclusively from white grapes – i.e. 100% Chardonnay
- **“Blanc de Noirs”** – made exclusively from the red (also known as “black”) grapes, either singly or a combination of the two.
- **“Rosé”** – made from any combination of two or three of the varieties. The pink color is obtained either by blending in a portion of red still-wine, or by letting a portion of the juice macerate with the skins of red grapes.
- But it’s all “white”! Yes, it is. It’s import to remember that the juice from all wine grapes is clear – it is only if you let the skins soak together with the juice that one gets any color from the “red” wine grapes. For Champagne, the Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes are treated just like the Chardonnay, in that the juice is pressed out immediately, and the juice is never in contact with the skins. Hence, “white” wine from red grapes.
- In addition to the four main categories of Champagne listed above, there is another classification based on the amount of residual sugar in the wine. (We’ll explain in detail later the mechanics of this. For now just know that at the end of the winemaking process, varying amounts of sugar are added to most Champagnes.)
- The Seven Levels of Sweetness (or **Dryness**, as the case may be):
 - **Brut Nature** (Also known as Brut Zero, Ultra Brut, Brut Sauvage) – less than 3 grams per liter
 - **Extra Brut** – Less than 6 grams/liter
 - **Brut** – Less than 12 grams/liter
 - **Extra-sec** – 12-20 grams/liter
 - **Sec** – 17-35 grams/liter

- **Demi-sec** – 33-50 grams/liter
- **Doux** – 50+ grams/liter

In addition to all of the above classifications and categories, Champagnes also fall into one of the two following designations –

VINTAGE – A vintage Champagne is primarily, and sometimes entirely, from grapes grown in only one year. The appellation laws require a vintage-dated wine to be a minimum of 85% from the stated vintage – the other 15% can be from one or more other vintages. A producer may produce a vintage wine from whatever vintages he or she wishes – though most will not make vintage wine in the lesser quality years. It is up to the individual producer to decide whether a vintage wine will be produced in a given year. Vintage wines must age a minimum of three years prior to release. Only 10-15% of all Champagne is vintage-dated.

NON-VINTAGE – 85-90% of all Champagne is non-vintage, meaning that the wine is a blend from grapes grown in two or more years. It is often said that the essence of non-vintage Champagne is the art of blending – using many different components and building blocks to arrive at a consistent flavor profile and character (or lack thereof).

History

Before we dive into the winemaking process, let's take a look at a little history.

- Champagne hasn't always been a sparkling wine! Until the late 1600s, Champagne was exclusively a still red wine, made from the Pinot Noir grape. (Thus making Champagne a major competitor to Burgundy. The two regions were in fact bitter enemies throughout the centuries.)
- *Dom Perignon*, the monk widely credited for "inventing" Champagne (and now a brand-name used by Moët et Chandon for their luxury brand), was actually charged with the mission to "stop the bubbles" from happening in the wines! He was the cellar master at the Abbey of Hautvillers in the late 1600s, when the monks grew tired of losing 15-25% of their wines every year to unwanted fermentations that were occurring in the bottle. (The bottles were literally exploding in the cellars.) Instead of "stopping" the bubbles, Dom Perignon figured out how to control the process. His biggest contributions were coming up with the use of corks to close the bottles, which replaced the hemp-rag shoved into the bottle neck with a plug of wood, and he championed the art of blending – different grapes and villages, to make the most harmonious cuvée.

Méthode Champenois

The *Méthode Champenois* is the intricate, expensive, time-intensive and labor intensive process by which all Champagne is made. There are of course many others ways to make sparkling wine – but none of them produce results with anywhere near the quality of this method. It was arrived at by trial and error, like all winemaking practices over the centuries. The main point of difference from any other method is that wine produced this way *undergoes a second alcoholic fermentation in the bottle* – thus each bottle is its own unique fermentation vessel. Here's a step-by-step look at the process...

All grapes are harvested by hand – picking machines are not allowed. The grapes are pressed as soon as possible after picking. The press is filled with whole bunches of grapes, and the clear juice is pressed out directly into tanks

The juice from the first pressing, the best quality juice, is in Champagne lingo called the *Cuvée*. Most grower Champagnes use only this top quality juice. Lesser quality juice from the 2nd pressing is called the *Taille*, and is often used by the large negociants in their mass-market bottlings. A third pressing produces an even lower quality juice that is called the *2ème Taille* – and is only used in the French equivalent of André's Cold Duck.

Débourbage. The juice is chilled to about 38 degrees, and allowed to settle for a day or two, in order to clarify the juice and to separate the juice from any solids

The clear juice is then transferred into temperature controlled tanks for fermentation. Most grower Champagne is allowed to ferment using only the wild, indigenous yeasts, while most negociant Champagne is inoculated with cultured, commercial yeast. A cool fermentation (at 65-68 degrees) ensues, lasting 3-10 days. (A very tiny amount of Champagne is fermented in oak barrels – only a small percentage of producers employ this technique.)

Champagne grapes at harvest rarely exceed 10-11% potential alcohol due to the extremely cool climate in which they're grown. If the grapes were harvested at lower potential alcohol levels, the producer may chaptalize – add sugar to the juice during fermentation – to bring the alcohol level up to 10.5-11% when fermentation completes.

After the primary alcoholic fermentation, malolactic fermentation is allowed to happen in most cases. Malolactic fermentation is a naturally occurring process that converts the sharp, crisp malic acid – the acid that's in apples, into the softer lactic acid – the acid that's in milk. Some producers choose to block the

malolactic fermentation, preferring to keep their wines higher in acidity.

When the malolactic fermentation is complete, you then have a very acidic and not so pleasant tasting base wine, called the **Vin Clair**. At this stage it tastes green, harsh, and fairly astringent. It is hard to believe that it will one day be transformed into the delightful beauty that we know as Champagne!

Next comes the **assemblage** – the blending of different *Vins Clairs*, selecting how much Chardonnay, or Pinot Noir, or Pinot Meunier to use in the blend (the different grapes are pressed and fermented separately), how much wine from this vintage, how much from previous vintages, etc.

Then the final blend is put into bottles. A calculation is made as to how much sugar needs to be added to bring the alcohol level to approx. 12% after the next fermentation.

Now the **Liqueur de Tirage** is added to the bottled wine. This is a blend of sugar, yeast, and wine. The bottle is closed with a crown cap – like on a bottle of beer or Coke. The bottles are then laid on their sides – **sur lattes** – in a cool (50-55F) cellar, and the second fermentation occurs in the bottle – a process that is simply the yeasts eating the sugar, which produces CO₂ and alcohol. This second fermentation, called the **Prise de Mousse**, will take about three months. The alcohol level will rise to about 12% after this fermentation.



Stacking the bottles sur-lattes for fermentation

When the second fermentation is finished, a sticky sludge of dead yeast cells will have dropped out of the liquid and attached itself to the walls of the bottle.

The process called **Rémouage**, or Riddling is next – slowly and methodically turning the bottles several times per day and tilting them at increasing angles, so eventually the bottles are fully upside down, and all of the yeast sediment has moved and settled onto the inside of the crown cap. Done by hand, this process takes 8-12 weeks. Mechanical gyro- pallettes can now do the riddling in about 7 days – and most negociants do all of their riddling mechanically these days. Many growers still do it by hand, or at the very least for their top of the line bottlings and all of their magnums and large formats.



Riddling by hand



Riddling by gyro-palette



Dead yeast in the bottle neck near the end of remouage

Once the yeast sediment has finally all moved onto the cap, the bottles are stored on their heads – *sur pointes* – and aged for a minimum of 12 more months for non-vintage Champagne, or about 30 months minimum for the vintage stuff.

The producers may choose to age their wines much longer than the minimum. The longer the wine ages on its lees – the yeast sediment – the more richness and flavor development will occur. Some top bottlings are aged 10+ years before release. When the decision has been made to release the wine, first the yeasty sludge needs to be removed from the bottle. But how do you do that?

It's an ingenious process called *Dégorgement* – or Disgorging. The bottles are placed neck-down for just a minute or so into a solution of freezing brine. This freezes the yeast sediment along with the first inch or so of liquid in the neck. And turns it into a firm, slushy pellet.



The frozen pellet, just prior to disgorging

Then the crown cap is removed. And the slushy pellet (along with a few drops of wine) is forced out of the bottle by the pressure of the CO2 gas in the wine.

Then, immediately after the ejection of the pellet, the **Liqueur d'Expédition** is added – otherwise known as the **Dosage**. This is the slurry of Brandy or wine and Cane Sugar that determines the level of sweetness in the Champagne – as detailed above in the Seven Levels of Sweetness.

And finally the Champagne is corked, the wire cage is applied to make sure the cork stays in, and the bottle is foiled, labeled, boxed, and readied for shipment.

The disgorging, addition of the Liqueur d'Expédition, and the corking-foiling-labeling process is all done at the same time on an automated line, ensuring consistency from bottle to bottle. (Consistency used to be a huge problem in the past, when all of these processes were carried out by hand, a practice that continued until the 1970s.)

The finished product is a bottle that contains between 40 million and 250 million bubbles – the product of all the CO2 gas trapped in the wine from the in-bottle fermentation. When the cork is popped, the bubbles are released (and the party has begun)!

Other than that, it's a pretty simple process!