



scott paul  
wines

## Champagne Club!

Fall 2013

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

This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (*and if you're not already a member, call Kelly Karr at 503-319-5827*). 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 and enjoy them. Whichever path you choose – there's lots of good bubbly in your future!

This shipment will turn you on to **Six Great Grower Champagnes UNDER \$50**. Fine Champagne does not require a platinum card, and it's not just for the independently wealthy. At least not anymore. Sure, you can buy nice bubbly in the \$100-\$3,500 per bottle range – some of it very delicious, in fact. But why subsidize a corporation's marketing budget when you can put your money where it counts – into what actually goes into the bottle! This is going to be fun...

For those of you new to the club, or if you just want to brush up, we'll review the Champagne basics first. If you're already up to speed on all that, feel free to skip ahead to all the info specific to this shipment...



## Grower Champagne

We import exclusively, and this club features exclusively, **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.

The big names that you are likely familiar with – Moët et Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Mumm, Roederer, 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 150 of them are available here in the U.S.!*

Most negociant Champagne is mass-produced, often over-priced, and can be quite lacking in character. (A very small portion of it however, is outstanding, and in fact can be among the best in all of Champagne.) Negociant Champagne is hugely successful, and is certainly the world's most celebrated wine.

Unfortunately, most of it just isn't very good. They produce 88% of the wine, but own only 12% of the vineyards. Their production methods are designed to bring the wines down to a lowest common denominator. Hence our motto – ***Friends don't let friends drink negociant Champagne!***



## 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 negotiant 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.
  - **Valée 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 of generally lesser quality. All three grapes are grown here.
  - **The Aube** – 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.

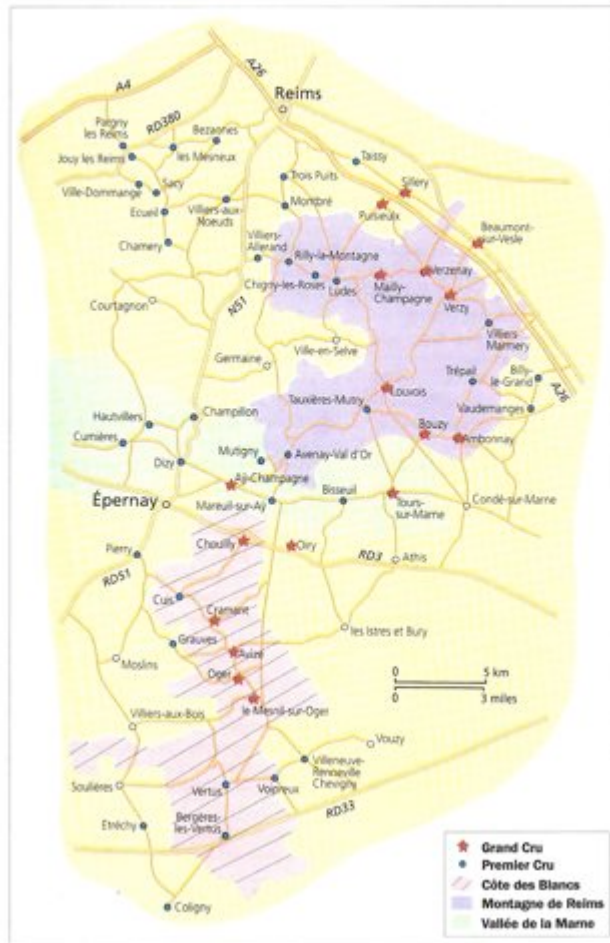
The first three regions listed above account for the vast majority of Champagne production, though the Côte de Sezanne and the Aube are growing rapidly.

Below is a map with a good overview of the entirety of the Champagne appellation, followed by a map focusing on the three main sub-regions.

# Carte du vignoble de Champagne



## Map of Champagne



- 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 is 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 80-99%

There are only 17 Grand Cru villages – noted in red stars in the map above. 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.

- 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 important 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:

**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 contribution was actually 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.

## 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 2<sup>nd</sup> pressing is termed the *1er Taille*,

and is often used by the large negociants in their mass-market bottlings. A 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 handful 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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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 –



Or by gyro-palette –



Here's a look at the sediment as it nears 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.
- 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 CO<sub>2</sub> gas in the wine.

**A look at the frozen pellet just prior to disgorging –**



- 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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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 ☺

## Great Grower Champagne Under \$50!

Champagne production has been dominated by the large negociant houses for centuries. They each may have their own twist on things, but their basic production protocols are not all that different, and probably haven't changed much in the last hundred years or so (except for the major technological advancements adopted by virtually all – refrigeration, automation, pneumatic presses, etc.)

One thing that has changed is the pricing, which of course goes nowhere but up. The producers making millions of cases are competing for worldwide market share, which means they need to spend a virtual fortune on marketing. Hiring movie stars to do your print ads and tv commercials costs millions of dollars. And that's just one of the reasons a wine that should rightly sell for \$30 hits the shelves at \$59.99 or more.

The negociants also charge big bucks simply because they think they can still “get away with it.” There's a lingering perception among consumers that “if it's expensive it must be better.” Often there's nothing more than that behind the pricing of many “luxury” Champagnes.

The small Grower-Producers, however, have no marketing budget, no ad agencies, and no movie stars. Just the grapes they grow in the family vineyards, and a cellar under the family house. And of course their wines - wines that taste like they came from *somewhere*, and were made by *someone*, rather than the anonymous and formulaic product of the negociant factories.

The Grower wines are produced by hand, involving more time and labor than the industrial-strength wines that are produced in factories (which are mostly automated, in fact). So the Grower wines should cost more, right? Actually, it's just the opposite. With Grower Champagnes – you're paying for the actual wine, not the “prestige” of the brands and their marketing budgets. Dollar for dollar, Grower Champagne may just be the best wine value on the planet. And we've got six of them for you under \$50 to explore. Happy tasting!

## The Wines

From four producers in four different villages, these six wines represent a good cross-section of the spectrum of Grower Champagne. Different blends of grapes, different terroir, different winemaking styles – but all delicious examples, full of personality. The only thing they lack is the artificially high price tag.

## 1. Brut Sélection – Marc Chauvet

\$45 CLUB \$38.25

- 60% Pinot Noir
- 40% Chardonnay
- Dosage 9 g/l
- Based on the 2008 vintage, with 20% reserve wines from 2007
- Malolactic fermentation blocked
- Fermented in stainless-steel tanks
- Disgorged November 2012

The Chauvet family has been growing grapes and making Champagne since 1529, with 32 acres of vines on the family estate in the village of Rilly-la-Montagne. Winemaker Clotilde Chauvet and her viticulturist brother Nicolas are the current generation in charge.

Their Brut Sélection is one step above their basic NV Brut – the *Sélection* gets an extra year or two of ageing on the lees before release, and is made exclusively from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay (their basic Brut is always one-third of each major Champagne grape – Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay.)

The village of Rilly-la-Montagne lies right in the heart of the Montagne de Reims, approximately half-way between Reims and Epernay – a sweet-spot for the Pinot Noir that dominates this cuvée. The Chauvet style is focused on the crisp and bright citrus flavors end of the spectrum. Thus, they choose to block the malolactic fermentation in the base wine, in order to keep the fresh and lively malic acidity. For many years this has been one of my go-to daily Champagnes (and yes, I do attempt to drink Champagne every day. I highly recommend it!)





## 2. Carte Blanche NV Brut – Forget-Chemin

\$42 CLUB \$35.70

- One-third each Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier & Chardonnay
- From parcels in 10 different villages across Champagne
- 30% 2009 fruit, 70% reserve wines from '08, '07, '06 and older vintages
- Vinified in stainless-steel tanks
- Dosage 11 grams
- Disgorged July 2012



*In the cellar with Thierry Forget*

Thierry Forget is the fourth generation of the family to head the estate, based in the village of Ludes (just down the road from the Chauvets in neighboring Rilly-la-Montagne.) Their vineyard holdings total 30 acres, but they are spread out over 60+ different parcels in 10 different villages.

Forget-Chemin is one of the original members of Champagne's "Special Club", a group of 25 top grower-producers that peer-review each other's wines and designate exceptional bottlings to be sold and labeled as Special Club Champagnes.

Thierry loves the complexity of working with a broad palette of terroirs, as well as base wines from multiple vintages. Skillfully bringing all of these parts together to make one glorious whole, Thierry keeps reserve wines from every vintage going back 15+ years in his cellar to have at his disposal in creating his delicious blends.

The Carte Blanche (which simply means "White Label") bottling represents the largest portion of his production (about 4,000 cases made each year.) All the wines go through full malolactic fermentation here. In comparison to the Chauvet Brut Sélection above, you'll find it richer and creamier in the mouth and more floral on the nose. A very different style, but every bit as delicious.

### 3. NV Brut Carte Noir – Forget-Chemin

\$58 CLUB \$49.30

- **80% Pinot Meunier, 20% Chardonnay**
- **100% 1er Cru**
- **Fermented in stainless-steel tank**
- **60% from the '09 vintage, 40% reserve wines**
- **Malolactic fermentation was blocked**
- **Dosage 9 g/l**
- **Disgorged March 2012**

Less than 1,000 cases of the Carte Noir are produced each year, and the composition can vary every year – it all depends on what Thierry thinks will make the most interesting wine. This one is mostly Pinot Meunier, so the perfumed, delicate, floral aromatics and creamy texture on the palate are very much in evidence. All of the older reserve wines in the blend add a lot of depth and complexity to the flavors. I first tasted this cuvée in the cellar with Thierry in March this year, and found it deep, rich, round, long, and intense. If you don't like it, give it back – I'll drink it!



### 4. NV Brut Tradition – Pierre Brigandat

\$44 Club\$37.40

- **100% Pinot Noir**
- **100% from the estate vineyard in the village of Channes**
- **Based on 2010, with 10% reserve wines from '09**
- **All stainless-steel fermented**
- **Dosage – 8g/l**
- **Disgorged October 2012**



Now we head down to Champagne's southern frontier, the region known as The Aube. The Champagne region is vast – it's about a 2-hour drive from Reims down to the southern reaches of the Aube. We'll stop here in the village of Channes to taste the lovely work of Bertrand Brigandat (who took the reins of the family estate from his father Pierre in 2001.)

The Brigandat vineyard is in fact the very last vineyard at the southern border of Champagne – cross the road a few kilometers and you'd be in Chablis. The soil here is the same as you'd find in Chablis – Kimmeridgian limestone – which imparts a distinct and intense minerality to the wines. Bertrand's dad was the first to plant grapes here in the modern era, putting his first vines in the ground in 1965.

What a lovely wine! Deep fruit flavors, with some notes of red berries, apricots, dried fruits and ginger, and excellent power and weight. This is a full, rich Champagne, and truly one of the great values on the planet.



## 5. NV Brut 1er Cru – Francis Cossy

\$44 CLUB\$37.40

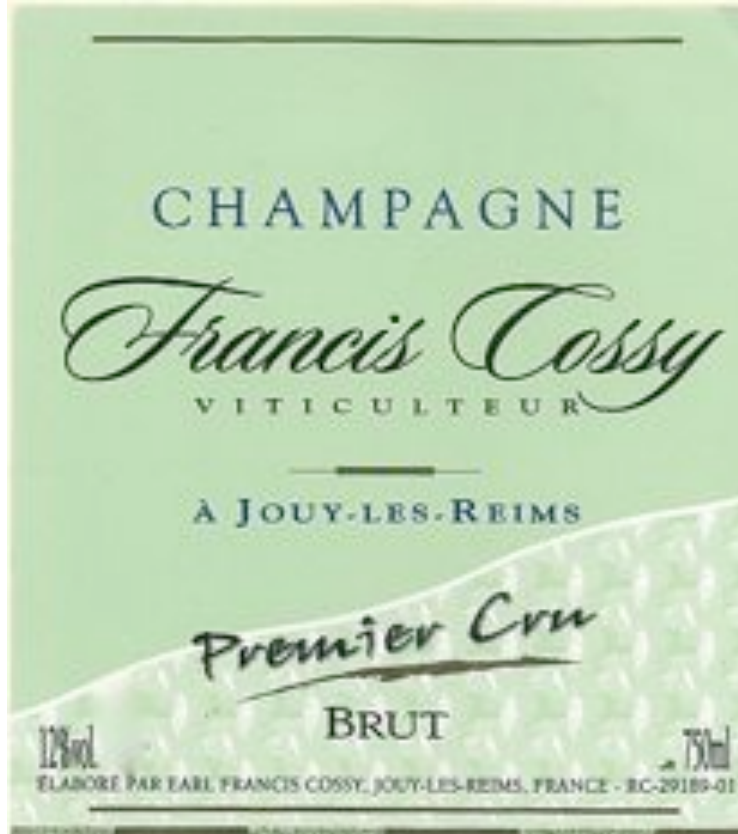
- **One-third each Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier & Chardonnay**
- **60% from the 2009 vintage, 40% reserve wines from '08 & '07**
- **100% tank fermented**
- **Dosage 9g/l**
- **Disgorged October 2012**

Francis Cossy passed away five years ago, and his daughter Sophie, then 25, took over the winemaking and farming at the family estate in Jouy-lès-Reims (a tiny village on the western outskirts of Reims.)



Sophie quickly proved to have a great feel for the vines and the wines, and has become one of Champagne's brightest rising stars in just a few short years. The family estate of just over 25 acres is entirely in Jouy-lès-Reims and the neighboring village of Pargny-lès-Reims – acreage that has been in the family since 1764.

Her winemaking style is very traditional, and showcases the captivating floral aromas and delicate fruit flavors that her vineyards produce. White flowers, citrus – an ethereal, weightless style that delivers big flavor on a lithe and elegant frame. I'm always ready for this one – breakfast, lunch or dinner!



## 6. NV Brut Rosé – Francis Cossy

\$50 **CLUB\$42.50**

- **66% Pinot Noir**
- **34% Chardonnay**
- **All from the 2009 vintage**
- **Fermented in stainless-steel tank**
- **17% Pinot Noir red still wine added to the blend**
- **Disgorged May 2012**
- **Dosage 8g/l**

Sophie's rosé is, in a word, delightful. A pure expression of elegance and grace, with very complex flavors that make this an outstanding bubbly to have with savory dishes. Think roast chicken with morels, grilled salmon, or a pork tenderloin. Yum !

The lovely pink color comes from the Pinot Noir that was fermented as a red still wine, and then added to the final blend before going into the bottle for the second fermentation. This is a rosé made by the « assemblage » method, rather than the « saignée » method.

A delicious, handcrafted rosé Champagne for under \$50 ? There are very few of them on the planet. Savor with delight !

## 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 Scott Paul Champagne Club shipment coming in the spring, and of course for arrival and release information on all the yummy Bubblicies headed our way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website:

**[www.scottpaul.com](http://www.scottpaul.com)**

**Attention Burgundy Fans and Oregon Pinot Fans!** *If you have not done so already, check out our **Burgundy Club** and our new **Scott Paul Club**. Contact Kelly Karr at 503-319-5827 or [kellykarr@scottpaul.com](mailto:kellykarr@scottpaul.com) for more info.*