



Champagne Club

Spring 2020



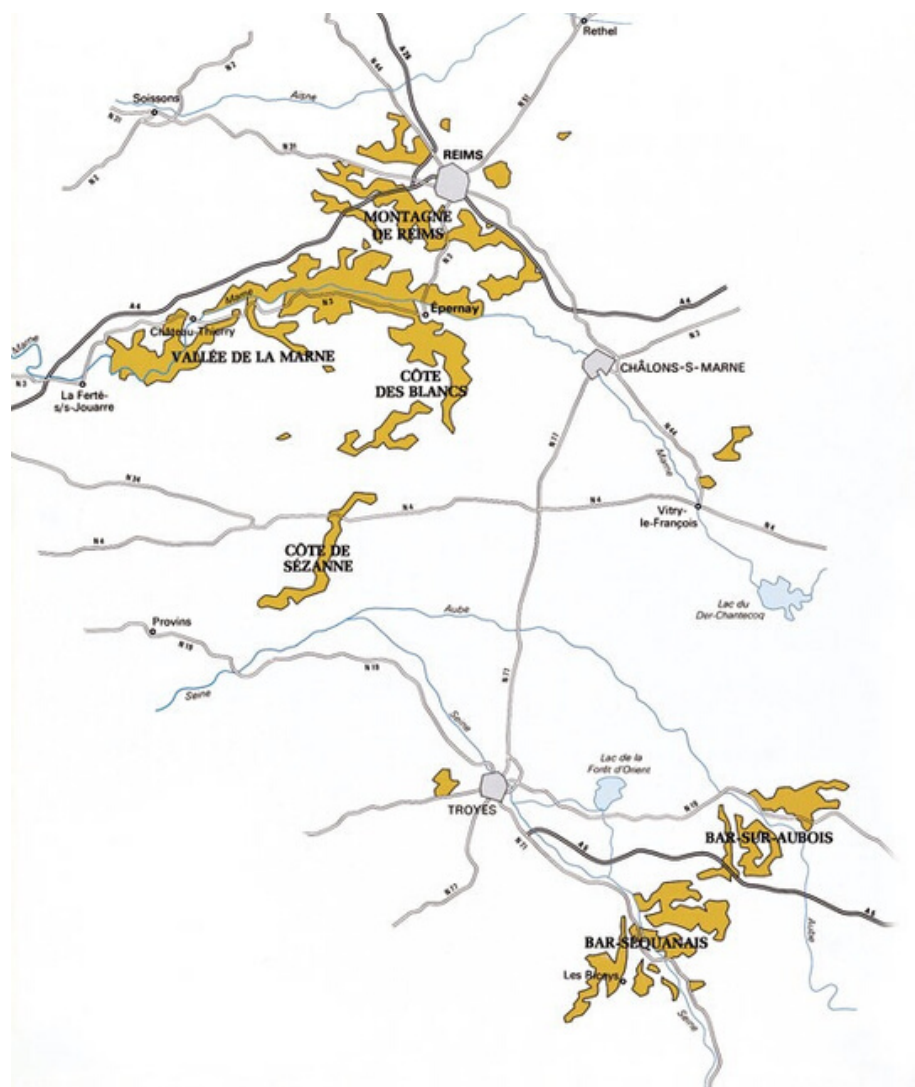
Welcome to the latest edition of the **Caveau Champagne Club** – a twice-yearly tutored tasting and exploration of some of the most fascinating sparkling wines on earth – Grower Champagnes.

This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (and if you're not already a member, you can sign-up on the website). Also, check-out our new **"House Wine" Clubs** if you're interested in a regular supply of yummy Burgundy at around \$20-\$25 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.

For this package, we're going to do a mini-study of **Blanc de Blancs Champagnes** from three different sub-regions, then check out a cutting-edge **Pinot Noir-based bubbly** from the renegade **Aube** district, and finish up with two **Pinot Meunier**-focused wines from superstar producer **Laherte Frères**.





Yes, Champagne is a wine of place.

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 - as there is clear evidence that as far back as the late 1600s they 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, 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!

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 our **Champagne 101 tutorial** on our website under "Champagne Club".

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 over 7,500 of these small grower-producers in Champagne, but fewer than 300 of them are available here in the U.S.



Grower Vs 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 negocies who 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. 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 producers, who we think are making some of the most exciting wines to be found anywhere.



Chardonnay - Three Ways

With the first three wines in your package, we'll clearly illustrate the concept of terroir. By focusing on a single grape variety, but grown in three different sectors of Champagne, we'll see that the points of difference in the resulting wines are primarily **place-focused**. Some of the differences will of course be due to the winemaker's style or choice of techniques during the winemaking process, but the underlying difference is undoubtedly the soils and micro-climates that produced the grapes.

Chardonnay accounts for roughly one-third of the grapes grown in Champagne, and it is grown throughout the region, though there is hardly any Chard down in the Aube, Champagne's southern frontier (which is nearly 100% Pinot Noir country.) Delicious **Blanc de Blancs Champagnes** can come from throughout Champagne, though the Grand Cru villages of the Côte des Blancs get most of the press and enjoy the loftiest reputation. That said, let's dive in!





Champagne Cossy - 2012 "l'Instant" Blanc de Blancs - \$60

Winemaker Sophie Cossy's vineyards are all in the adjoining villages of Jouy-lès-Reims, Pargny-lès-Reims and Ville-Dommange in the heart of the "Petite Montagne" section of the Montagne de Reims. "Petite" does not infer that it is lesser, it is simply a reference to a generally lower elevation than the "Grand Montagne" section to the east and south. Just 10 minutes west of the city, it's a sea of vines as far as you can see in every direction, and all three major Champagne grapes are grown here. 50% of the acreage on the Petite Montagne is planted to Pinot Meunier, 35% is Pinot Noir, with only 15% devoted to Chardonnay. The soils have a lot of sand mixed in with clay over the chalk bedrock, with the resulting wines tending to be dense and more structured as a general rule.

There are very few Blanc de Blancs produced on the Petite Montagne, mostly due to the limited amount of Chardonnay planted there. It happens to be one of the best areas for Pinot Meunier - which otherwise is mostly planted in the Vallée de la Marne. The Meunier here is indeed excellent, but this wine shows you how exciting the Chard can be as well. This is only the second time Sophie has produced a Blanc de Blancs, the first version being the yummy 2011 you may have had the chance to try.

The terroir on the Petite Montagne brings more fruit richness to the Chardonnay, and it is less overtly chalk-driven than Chard grown elsewhere. Sophie chose to vinify the base wine in stainless steel tank as is tradition, but then to give it an extending aging period in large **oak Foudres**, the oval shaped casks that are more commonly associated with Alsatian or German wines. The oak is neutral, it doesn't impart any "wood" flavor to the wine, but rather lets it breath a bit via the micro-oxygenation the occurs through the pores of the staves. This adds texture to the the wine as well as aromatic richness. Then, after 8 months in the casks, the wine is bottled for the second fermentation to become Champagne. Then, after 6 years of aging in the bottle, it is ready for disgorgement and release.

I loved the 2011 version, but this '12 is even a notch better, I believe. It's incredibly fresh on the nose, with whiffs of grapefruit and some faint floral notes. It seems very much "alive", brimming with energy and intensity, and a sneaky minerality on the quite lengthy finish. Only 1,000 bottles were produced - and Caveau club members now collectively own a major portion of the production. Enjoy!

- 100% Chardonnay from organically-farmed estate vineyards
- 100% from the 2012 harvest
- Over 6 years on the lees in bottle
- Disgorged in July, 2019 with a dosage of 4 grams per liter.



The Oak Foudres, where the Cossy is aged

Champagne Marc Chauvet “Cuvée Duo” Blanc de Blancs - \$56



Nicolas and Clotilde Chauvet

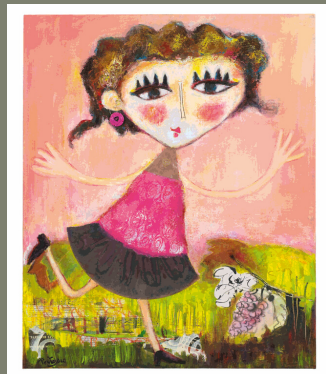
Now we move to the “Grand Montagne” section of the Montagne de Reims. It’s higher elevation here, and the soils are more classically chalk and limestone based, with little to no sand in the mix. Winemaker **Clotilde Chauvet** and her viticulturist brother **Nicolas** are the current generation in charge of a family estate that dates to 1529!

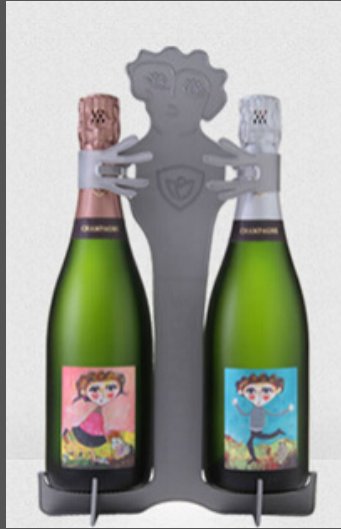
They're based in the village of **Rilly-la-Montagne**, part of a broad, north-facing hillside in the heart of the Montagne. This is Pinot Noir country, predominately. Overall it's 41% Pinot Noir, 35% Pinot Meunier and 25% Chardonnay in these parts - and it's unique in that it is the only part of the Champagne region where all three grapes perform very well.

Like the Cossy wine above, a Blanc de Blancs is a bit of a rarity in these parts - not many are made, but the ones that are can be quite excellent. Clotilde has only made this cuvée twice in the last 15 years - she only does it when she thinks she has some really exceptional Chardonnay that will shine brightest on its own.

The malolactic fermentation is blocked in all of the Chauvet wines. It's a stylistic choice, and Clotilde prefers to keep the crisp, malic acid, and then will add a slightly higher dosage to bring the wine into full harmony.

It's called **Cuvée Duo** because it was first originally created to celebrate the birth of Nicolas' twins - a boy and a girl. Clo and Nicolas connected with an artist friend to design the label - or shall we say labels - as there are actually two different labels for this wine. Look in your box and see if you received the "Boy" or "Girl" version. **The wine is exactly the same, the only difference is the label.**





Citrus, green apple and faint white flowers dominate the nose. You notice immediately that it's a powerful Champagne, cutting a wide swath across the palate with deep fruit and the signature Chauvet bright acidity. Most notable is how immensely complex this wine is - owing to it's 10 months of aging in small oak barrels, and a full **nine years of bottle aging** before disgorgement and release. All that extra time on the dead yeast cells adds layers and layers of texture, aromas and flavors - this is a monumentally beautiful effort!

- 100% Chardonnay from the Chauvet estate
- 100% from the 2010 harvest
- Nine years of extended lees contact
- Disgorged in June 2019, dosage 9 grams per liter



Champagne Paul Launois “Monochrome” - \$49

This is the 2nd time we've had the honor of being able to include this amazing wine in your Club package. Two years ago we introduced you to winemaker **Julien Launois** and his exciting new project Paul Launois, named after his young son. In 2015 Julien and his wife Sarah took over his father's estate (formerly known as Champagne Jean-Pierre Launois) - 11 acres of immaculate Grand Cru vines in Champagne's most prestigious village, **Mesnil-sur-Oger**.

The bottling from the 2015 vintage, which he's named **“Monochrome”**, is the first wine Julien produced from scratch (their “Composition” bottling which has also been featured in the Club previously is a blend of his father's 2011 & 2013 reserve wines.)

Monochrome does not mean “one-dimensional”. Rather, it refers to the concept of “one grape, one place” - Chardonnay from the intensely chalky soils of Mesnil-sur-Oger, reputed to be the most “mineraly” of all the Côte des Blancs villages. The Côte des Blancs acreage is planted 98% to Chardonnay, and with good reason. It's where Chardonnay reaches the fullest and most complete expression of its majesty. If you've ever had a mature bottle of **Salon** or **Krug's Clos du Mesnil** you know the amazing potential



I was fortunate to be able to sit in on the dosage trials for this wine with Julien and Sarah. Always a fascinating exercise, and often an eye-opener in that “less” can indeed be “more”, and vice-versa. I’ve loved following this wine through its evolution. This is a more recent disgorgement than the version that was in the Club package a year ago. Laser-pure, vibrant and precise - this is rockin’ good juice!

Chardonnay-based Champagnes tend to develop to their fullest later than Pinot or Meunier-based wines. Now with an extra year on the lees, it’s even more expressive, with signature lemon-lime notes and hints of grapefruit and a very refined, delicate mousse, all of which together create the impression of pure, liquid minerals. This is textbook Mesnil-sur-Oger, one of the truly great spots on the planet for Chardonnay.

- 100% from the 2015 vintage
- 100% Grand Cru Chardonnay from Mesnil-sur-Oger
- Vinification in stainless-steel tank, malolactic fermentation allowed to complete
- Bottled in July, 2016
- Disgorged June 2019 – 3 years on the lees
- Dosage – 4 g/l



Bertrand Brigandat

Champagne Pierre Brigandat Brut Nature \$36

The Grower Champagne revolution first took hold in a big way in the **Aube** - the southernmost reaches of the Champagne appellation. Growers in the Aube had to fight to have their vineyards included in the Champagne appellation, and the legendary "Champagne Riots" finally saw them achieve their desired status in the early 1900s. That said, the Reims and Epernay-based negociants always paid significantly less for grapes from the Aube, and grape-growing was not a terribly profitable endeavor for the small farmers in the region. A grower with 5 acres in the Côte des Blancs could live a comfortable upper middle-class life, while a grower with 5 acres in the Aube was barely eking out a living.

So, with very little to lose, some intrepid Aube growers started bottling their own wines, many of them to great critical acclaim. The first "stars" started emerging in the 1990s, and now every tiny village in the Aube has at least a handful of excellent grower-producers.



The Aube is a whole different universe from the rest of Champagne - it's a 2.5-hour drive from Reims and feels like many worlds apart. It's a massive area - over 19,000 acres of vines, 86% of which are Pinot Noir, with only 10% Chardonnay and the balance Pinot Meunier (with a tiny bit of Pinot Blanc still around as well, called "blanc vrai" in the local parlance.) The soils throughout the region are mostly Kimmeridgian limestone - the same soil found in Chablis - which is just a couple kilometers down the road, in fact.

Bertrand Brigandat makes the wines from vines planted in 1965 by his father Pierre. They are situated in the hamlet of Channes, the very last village in the Champagne appellation before you cross over into Chablis. We've had the privilege of turning America onto the Brigandat wines for nearly a decade now. Not only are they always flat-out delicious, they are unbelievably great values - you simply cannot get better bang for your bubbly buck anywhere I know of.

When I was tasting with Bertrand in November, I was excited to discover his first-ever **Brut Nature** bottling - a Champagne made without any sugar addition (dosage). I'm a huge fan of non-dosé Champagnes - when they're done well, meaning that when the underlying fruit is ripe and rich enough to warrant it. There are way too many Brut Natures on the market today simply because it is trendy. That's actually sad, because most of those Champagnes would likely be vastly improved with a tiny dosage of a gram or two.

The Brigandat version is a Brut Nature that stands on its own, pure and naked, and needs no tweaking or cosmetic adjustments. Bertrand harvested perfectly ripe fruit in 2015, at over 11% potential natural alcohol - on the very high end for Champagne. His old vines on south-facing slopes are exposed to maximum sunlight and warmth over the growing season, and the flavor development in the fruit is superb.

I love the way Pinot Noir performs on the **Kimmeridgian** soil. Always rich and ripe, a touch “weightier” than northern Champagnes, and with a lovely underlying streak of lemon-lime and a distinct minerality that can only come from this unique spot on the planet.

- 100% Pinot Noir
- 100% from the 2015 vintage
- Tank fermented and aged
- Over three years on the lees
- Disgorged in May 2019, **ZERO dosage.**





Laherte Frères “Les Empreintes” 2013

\$62

Champagne **Laherte Frères** has been on a major roll since young Aurélien Laherte took full control of the operation some 8 years ago (though he’d been working side-by-side with his dad, Thierry, since 2002.) Aurélien is the 7th generation to run the family estate, one of the rare ones that started making and selling wine under their own label decades ago, before the Grower revolution began.

His dad embarked on some out-of-the-box thinking and non-traditional practices over 20 years ago, and Aurélien has taken them to fruition in his never ending quest for excellence, all in the name of making Champagnes that are first and foremost wines of place.

Laherte has vineyards in 10 different villages in Champagne, but is based in the hilltop village of **Chavot**, just a few minutes south of Epernay. It’s in the heart of what is known as the **Coteaux Sud d’Epernay** - a small group of villages that are sandwiched between the Marne Valley to the North and the Côte des Blancs just to the south.

GRANDS VINS DE CHAMPAGNE

Laherte Frères

DOMAINE FONDÉ EN 1889



à CHAVOT

TERROIRS HISTORIQUES
DU DOMAINE FAMILIAL

BOURSAULT : 70 ares de Meunier
 BRUYOT : 11 ares de Chardonnay et 29 ares de Meunier
 CHAVOT : 2,92 hectares de Chardonnay, 2,38 hectares de Meunier,
 39 ares de Pinot Noir, 22 ares de Pinot Meunier et 27 ares de complantation
 EPERNAV : 96 ares de Chardonnay
 LE BREUIL : 78 ares de Meunier
 MANDY : 8 ares de Chardonnay et 25 ares de Meunier
 MORANGIS : 21 ares de Meunier
 MOUSSY : 18 ares de Meunier
 VAUDANCOURT : 28 ares de Chardonnay et 67 ares de Meunier
 VERTUS : 14 ares de Chardonnay
 VOIPREUX : 48 ares de Chardonnay

www.champagne-laherte.com



It's a unique terroir. The chalk in this region is noticeably softer and more friable than the hard chalk found in the Côte des Blancs, and here it's usually covered by 50 centimeters to one meter of clay, often mixed with other elements such as silex, limestone, schist and marl. Combined with the diverse array of different expositions offered by the numerous folds and twists of the rolling slopes here, this creates a distinctive character in the wines that distinguishes them from those of the surrounding areas.

Laherte's **"les Empreintes"** (the Fingerprints) bottling is meant to capture the essence of the specific terroir of the village of Chavot, where steep, north-facing vineyards descend from the 11th-century church on the hilltop and Laherte's winery. This bottling is made every year, and it's always 50% Chardonnay and 50% Pinot Noir. The Chardonnay is from old vines planted in 1957 on clay-based soils over a chalk substrate, in a parcel called Les Chemins d'Epernay. About one-third of the Chard is a selection called "Muscaté", an intensely floral and aromatically expressive type of Chardonnay. The Pinot Noir is from a 1983 planting called Les Rouges Maisons, where the soils are relatively deep and strewn with chunks of limestone, flint and schist.

The result is a very expressive and bright Champagne. Malo-lactic was blocked to preserve the acidity, and the overall expression is crystalline and pure, a wine of great precision. It's one of the rare ones that brings together elegance and power in one package.

- 50% Pinot Noir, 50% Chardonnay, all from estate parcels in Chavot
- 100% from the 2014 harvest
- Vinified in old Burgundy Barrels, malolactic fermentation was blocked
- Disgorged by hand, dosage 3 grams per liter (Extra-Brut)
- Only 300 cases produced.



Laherte Frères - "Les Beaudiers" 2014

\$62

This is in many respects a "unicorn" wine. A Rosé Champagne that is not only 100% Pinot Meunier, but also has little or no dosage. And it's a Rosé de Saignée - meaning the color comes only from letting the Meunier grape skins macerate with the juice for a short while, rather than the more common practice of adding a small amount of red wine to the blend before going into the bottle for the second fermentation.



Aside from being quite a rarity, this is simply an extraordinary Champagne. It's all from old-vine Meunier on the Chavot hillside, in a vineyard called **Les Beaudiers**, comprised of plantings from 1953, 1958 and 1965. Like all of the Laherte parcels in the village, it is farmed **Biodynamically**, with no chemical herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers. Everything is done by hand, in the vineyard and winery, with painstaking detail.

This is one of my two favorite Rosé Champagnes in the world (the rarely produced Georges Laval Rosé being the other). It's a powerful, yet very refined wine, and clearly not something to sip on the porch as an apéritif. This is wine to go with food - we absolutely love it with roast chicken and truffles and morels, grilled salmon, and it's mind-blowing with sushi.

Strawberries and rose petals on the nose, vibrant red fruits on the palate, with an unreal depth and voluptuousness that is incredibly seductive. Broad, long, and creamy on the finish, this is absolute world-class stuff. Enjoy!

- 100% Pinot Meunier from Laherte's Les Beaudiers vineyard
- 100% from the rich 2014 vintage
- Grapes were de-stemmed and left to macerate for 12-14 hours in tank
- Vinified in used Burgundy barrels and aged in barrel for 6 months before bottling
- Malo-lactic fermentation was blocked
- Fermented, then and aged in bottle for over 4 years on the lees before disgorgment
- Dosage 1.5 grams per liter, June 2019



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 fall, and for pre-arrival offerings on all the yummy Bubblicies and Burgundies headed your way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website: **www.CaveauSelections.com**

Launched in 2005, **Caveau Selections** is owned and operated by Martha & Scott Wright, winemakers in Oregon, Champagne and Burgundy since 1999. 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. Email **scott@caveauselections.com** for more information.