



France, Champagne: Another Small Selection of Fine Champagnes

March 4, 2016

Just in case you ran out of Champagne at the end of last year, this is just a short list of recommendable Champagnes that I have tasted in the last few months on different occasions. Here, you will find some less well-known names such as Maurice Grumier, Remy Massin or Tristan H, as well as recently disgorged cuvées from world famous houses such as Pol Roger (including the 2004 Sir Winston Churchill), Jacquesson (including the new Extra-Brut Cuvée No. 739 and spectacular single vineyard cuvées from the 2005 vintage) and Moët & Chandon (including the Grand Vintages 2006 and the 1999 Collection). Champagne lovers with a heart for Pinot Meunier will certainly know Jérôme Prévost, whose extraordinary and delicate mono-cru, monovarietal and mono vintage cuvées from La Closerie, which I tasted with him in Berlin, just three days after the terrible terror attacks in Paris on November 13. The tasting of dozens of France's very best wine producers was planned to be held in the Ambassade de France in Berlin, but had to be cancelled short-term due to security concerns. Thanks to the solidarity of the owners and the heroic effort of Berlin wine importer Sébastien Visentin, this great event was finally held in the Pauly Saal in Berlin on November 16. Not only did all of the vintners show up, but hundreds of guests as well. It turned out to be an unforgettable tasting in a very special setting. It was that day when I fell in love with the fantastic Champagnes of Jacques Lassaigue, whose cuvées are highly appreciated by the world's finest restaurants, even though Lassaigue is not well represented in the media. Jacques, who farms four hectares of partly very old vines Chardonnay in Montgueux, does not send his Champagnes around for tastings. You either have to show up in Montgueux or in Berlin. Try to find his wines! If you ever see the 2010 Coteaux Champenoise Haut Revers du Chutat, you should definitely order it. This is a full-bodied and complex, pretty tropical-flavored Chardonnay table wine from 42-year-old vines that is not produced every year. This list will certainly be extended soon.

Stephan Reinhardt



**NV Jacquesson Extra Brut Cuvee
No 734 Degorgement Tardif**

The Extra Brut Cuvée No 734 Degorgement Tardif is based on the labor-intensive 2006 vintage (+27% Reserve wines), and blends 54% Chardonnay with 20% Pinot Noir and 26% Meunier. The "734 DT" was disgorged in October 2014 with a dosage of 3.5 grams per liter and is a great reflection of the Jacquesson vineyards, since it blends everything together to get the maximum of complexity without hiding the vintage character. Pure, deep and fresh on the lemon-flavored nose, this is a full-bodied, round and complex, highly elegant and stimulatingly dry Champagne that shows a lot of biscuit flavors. It's a very intense but well balanced and structured Champagne that should go very well with food.

Importer(s):

Vintage '59 Imports, 2800 Jenifer St, NW ,
Washington, DC 20015 , (202) 966-9218 ,
www.vintage59.com

Vin sur Vin Diffusion, Kopenicker Strasse
18-20, D-10997 Berlin, Germany, +49 30
695 199 20, www.weine-visentin.de

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**2005 Jacquesson Extra Brut Ay
Vauzelle Terme**

From a tiny 30-acre plot that Jean-Hervé Chiquet calls their best terroir (although its very sensitive to botrytis and does not get its grapes to full ripeness very often), the very rare 2005 Extra Brut Ay Vauzelle Terme opens with a very clear and intense, but also delicate sweet cherry bouquet intermixed with chalky and iodine flavors. The wine was opened four hours before and offers a lovely, fresh and fruity taste and a chalky/dusty texture along with white and red fruit flavors, as well as some dashes of lemon juice. This is a fascinatingly firm and very mineral Champagne full of vibrancy, finesse and delicacy. A serious and expressive terroir wine indeed and one of my absolute favorite Champagnes of 2015.

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**2005 Jacquesson Extra Brut
Premier Cru Dizy Corne Baustray**

A really complex and fresh brioche and vanilla bouquet with refreshing lemon flavors opens the 2005 Dizy Corne Baustray Extra Brut. This wine is sourced from a steep, one-hectare, southwest-facing Premier Cru Chardonnay vineyard that was planted with 9,000 vines per hectare in 1960 on Campanian chalk, with a two-to three-meter thick, gravelly structured clay and silt layer. This is a rich, explosively fresh and very complex, highly mineral Premier Cru with a long and fascinatingly salty and grippy finish. With 11.3% alcohol and 7.2 grams per liter of total acidity, this is a very expressive Champagne and has great character. The 2005 was the first Corne Baustray that was disgorged with a minimum of dosage (1.5 grams per liter). The wine was produced in 1995 for the first time, then again in 2000, 2002 and 2005, and we should be happy waiting for 2007, 2009, 2012, 2014 and "most likely" also in 2015.

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**2005 Jacquesson Brut Grand Cru
Avize Champ Cain**

Very discreet but mineral and complex on the fresh and chalky nose opens the 2005 Brut Grand Cru Avize Champ Cain. This is a very elegant, highly complex and very salty Grand Cru made from a south-facing 1.35 hectare single vineyard Chardonnay, which was planted in 1962 on pure limestone with almost no top soil. The millésime 2005 is a highly complex and refreshing, firmly structured and tension-filled wine of great finesse and elegance. It's all this: pure terroir, pure chalk and pure Jacquesson, but most of all -- extremely stimulating. However, don't waste its talents because I suppose the future of this outstanding Champagne is far ahead from now.

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**NV Jacquesson Cuvée 739
Extra-Brut**

Jacquesson's soon to be released Cuvée 739 Extra-Brut is based on the 2011 vintage and 31% Reserve wines, all from Grand and Premier Cru sites in the Côte des Blancs and Vallée de la Marne. The 739 is an assemblage of 57% Chardonnay, 21% Pinot Noir and 22% Meunier, all fermented with indigenous yeasts and aged in foudres. The unfiltered wine was disgorged in July 2014 with a dosage of 3.5 grams per liter. Medium-intense in its golden color, the Cuvée 739 shows a clear, deep, rich and complex nose of ripe white fruits, bread, honey wax, and spicy aromas intermixed with refreshing chalk and lemon flavors in the background. Full-bodied, lovely, pure and fresh on the palate, with nutty flavors and a stunningly smooth fruit, this is a full-flavored, wide open yet very delicate Champagne with a very fine and well structured mineral finish. This is not a big wine perhaps (although it starts a little bit as such), but a Champagne full of elegance and finesse. It's a great aperitif and food partner for lighter dishes. And a lovely midnight drink anyway.

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**2006 Jacques Lassaigue
Millesime Blanc des Blancs Brut
Nature**

The 2006 Millésime Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature from Montgueux's Le Cotet vineyard (64%) and 60-year-old vines in Les Paluets is a fascinating, absorbing Champagne. Golden in color, it offers a deep and rich yet unmasked, natural bouquet of yeasty-scented Chardonnay flavors quoting pineapples, buttercup, ripe honeydew melon, biscuits, turrón, white chocolate with pine nuts and dried apricots. Rich and full-bodied but pure and natural again on the palate, this is an intense, full-flavored and multi-layered Champagne with an alluringly salty finish. Each gram of more sugar would have reduced the purity, and by nature, the rich character of this Brut Nature that has power and complexity enough to mesmerize by its natural beauty.

I tasted the wine again in November 2015 and it offered a lovely iodine and chalky bouquet, a highly elegant and balanced palate with a complex minerality and structure, and an iodine/salty aftertaste. This is great Champagne and worth a try. The wine did not see any oak, although you might feel there must have been at least a kiss of oak -- none! The 2006 was disgorged in September 2013.

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**2010 Jacques Lassaigue Coteaux
Champenoise Haut Revers du
Chutat**

The bottle of the 2010 Coteaux Champenoise Haut Revers du Chutat had been opened 90 minutes before I tasted it together with Emmanuel Lassaigue in Berlin. From 42-year-old Chardonnay vines and aged for 22 months in small barrels without any bâtonnage, it delivers exotic fruit aromas (passion fruit, pineapples) intertwined with chalky and mocha flavors on the clear, ripe and complex nose. Bottled with 12.4% natural alcohol (which is pretty much for the region), this is a full-bodied, round, complex and very elegant, well structured and dry Chardonnay with a complex and lingering salty finish. The acidity is very well integrated, although as Emmanuel reports, it has been extremely high for years and has just recently fully integrated. Due to ripening problems, the Haut Revers du Chutat is not produced every year. So take the chance to check this wine out.

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**NV Jacques Lassaigue Les
Vignes de Montgueux Blanc de
Blancs Extra Brut**

This non-vintage Les Vignes de Montgueux Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is based on the vintages 2011 (52%), 2012 and 2010. Fermented in stainless steel, aged for one year in 228-liter barrels (malolactic fermentation included) and disgorged in December 2014 with no dosage, it delivers a complex and spicy bouquet with lovely oaky flavors. Dry and very mineral on the palate, this is a full-bodied, fine and refreshing Champagne with a long and complex, very expressive finish. An excellent Champagne from the Côte de Bar that is not marketed as Brut Nature because Emmanuel Lassaigue would find this labeling "too popular."

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**NV Jacques Lassaigue Cuvee Le
Cotet**

The non-vintage Cuvee Le Côtet Extra Brut is a 100% single vineyard Chardonnay from 50-year-old vines on very poor chalk soil. Fermented in 80% stainless steel and 20% 228-liter barrels, this cuvée is based 90% on the 2010 harvest, whereas the other 10% consist of the vintages 2007, 2005 and 2002. The wine shows a beautifully pure, complex, iodine and chalky bouquet mingled with ripe apple and citrus aromas. Full-flavored and full-bodied on the palate, this is a pure and lingeringly salty, very mineral and well structured Champagne of great purity and expression. It's very long and bone dry, of great finesse and elegance. This stringent and grippy Cotet is still very young but shall develop well over the next ten years easily, probably even 15 years.

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**NV Jacques Lassaigue La Colline
Inspiree Extra Brut**

The NV La Colline Inspirée Extra Brut is a 100% Chardonnay based on the vintages 2011 (65%, eight months in barrels on the full lees), 2010 (20 months in barrels on full lees) and 2009 (32 months on full lees) that were blended only one day before the bottling without any addition of sulfur. The wine was disgorged without dosage in November 2014 and offers a clear and fresh, very pure and mineral bouquet with lemon flavors. There seems to be a sea breeze in this Champagne that brings the flavors of oysters and lemons onto the nose. Full-bodied and very complex on the palate, this is a serious and vinous, firmly structured Champagne of great elegance and expression. Its acidity is very well integrated into the mineral body and the "inspired hill" is still closed but has a great future ahead.

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**NV La Closserie (Jerome Prevost)
Extra Brut Rose les Beguines Fac
Simile (LC 12)**

Made with 10% red wine, the non-vintage Extra Brut Rosé Fac Simile (LC12) is 100% Pinot Meunier picked in 2012. Made with 10% red wine but no maceration, the Fac Simile has a pale salmon color and offers a red currant-driven bouquet with spicy flavors. Quite intense and round on the palate (though the dosage end of 2014 is just two grams per liter), this creamy-textured Rosé reveals a serious structure with nice tannins and long and aromatic fruit. I would nevertheless drink this excellent Champagne not earlier than 2017 or even 2018.

Inspired by Anselm Selosse, Jérôme Prevost started marketing his own Champagnes in 1998. The first wines were still vinified at Selosse; since 2002, Jérôme has his own cellar in Gueux, Montaigne de Reims. The most stunning thing, however, is that he cultivates just one single plot, Les Béguines. It's a two-hectare vineyard and that means, it is ten times as big as an average parcel in the Montaigne de Reims. The calcareous, fossils-rich soil has been completely planted with mass selections of Meunier since the 1960s, and Jérôme produced just one wine of it until 2007: Les Béguines Extra Brut, of which less than 10,000 bottles are produced every year. Since then, the Rosé Fac Simile Extra Brut is ...

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**NV La Closserie (Jerome Prevost)
Brut Nature les Beguines (LC 07)**

A golden color dresses the NV Brut Nature les Béguines (LC 07) which is based entirely on the 2007 vintage and was disgorged at the end of 2009. The wine offers a well matured and vinous bouquet of very ripe and dried apples along with bread, nuts and orange peel aromas. Full-bodied, round and intense on the creamy textured palate, this is a superbly complex and well balanced Champagne that should be reserved for food. The finish is long and vinous, and reveals a delicate grip. Gorgeous!

"The 2007 was very reductive for a long time, but its been opened up for about two years now," says Jérôme Prevost. "The wines needs oxygen to find its natural beauty again," he goes on reporting that his wines go in a valley approximately two years after disgorgement and remain closed for two years or so before they come back as a completely different personality. "To be honest, I have never recognized my own Champagne when I had it young but I have also never failed when it came along as a matured wine. Les Béguines really gains complexity with age."

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**NV La Closserie (Jerome Prevost)
Extra Brut les Beguines (LC 12)**

Made from 100% Pinot Meunier, the NV Extra Brut les Béguines (LC 12) is entirely based on the 2012 vintage. The wine has a very delicate and fresh bouquet with lemon flavors, hints of red berries and cherries. There is great purity here. Medium-bodied and very elegant on the palate, this is a delicate, well structured and mineral Champagne with a fine red currant fruit in the long and refreshing finish. May I have another bottle please?

"2012 was a very nice and generous vintage," says Jérôme Prévost, who compares this millésime with 2002. After he showed me the LC07 from the 2007 vintage I have to warn you: Drink the first case of this promising Champagne soon, but leave the others untouched for about four or five years, because what you will get then will be so much more complex and simply great.

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