



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 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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