



# Champagne Club

FALL 2021



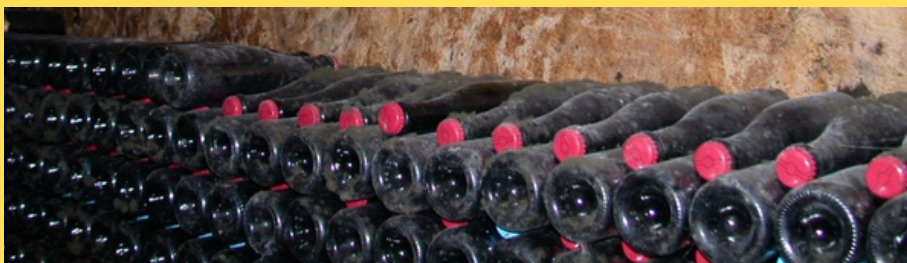
Welcome to the latest edition of the **Caveau Champagne Club** – a twice-yearly tutored tasting and exploration of some of the most fascinating sparkling wines on earth – Grower Champagnes.

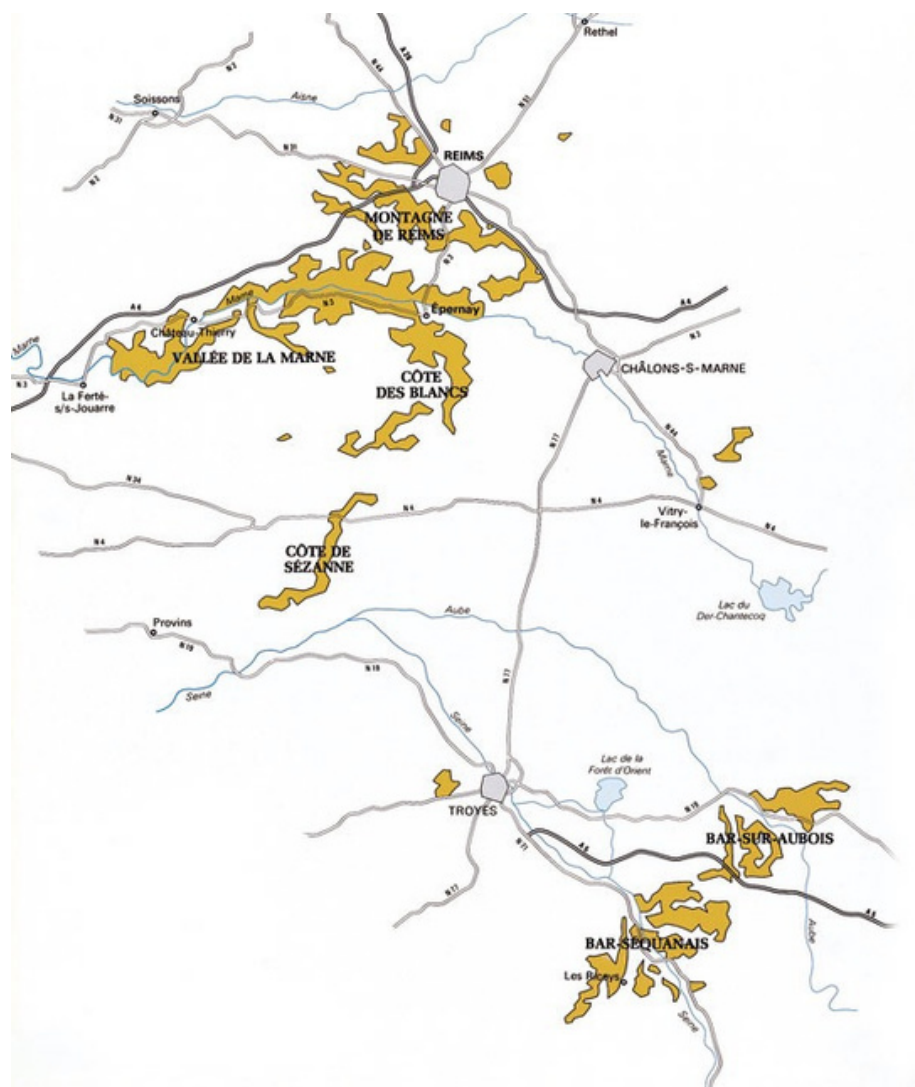
This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (and if you're not already a member, you can sign-up on the website). Also, check-out our new **"House Wine" Clubs** if you're interested in a regular supply of yummy Burgundy at around \$20-\$25 per bottle!

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.

This shipment takes us on a tour of three different sub-regions of the vast Champagne appellation - the **Montagne de Reims**, the **Coteaux Sud d'Eprenay**, and the **Aube**. In addition, we'll have the chance to explore the differences between younger, non-vintage Champagnes and some vintage-dated bottles.

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"**.





## **Yes, Champagne is Wine. It's also 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!



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.



## A Tour Around Champagne

There are **319 small villages** scattered across a vast area that collectively make up the region we know as Champagne. It takes up a lot of space in eastern France - it can take over two and a half hours to drive from one end to the other. There are vast stretches in the region where there are no vineyards at all. In those spots, the deep, rich soils are more suited to grain production (mostly wheat), as they lack the chalk that makes Champagne so unique. Sparkling wine from elsewhere in the world can be interesting, but it can never be Champagne. At the end of the day, **it's all about the chalk.**

Of course, not all chalk is created equal. There are examples of chalk from different geological eras, soft chalk, hard, stony chalk, chalk mixed with clay, chalk mixed with stones, chalk mixed with bands of limestone - all of which bring different things to the resulting wines. It's only been over the last 20-25 years or so that we've had real opportunity to taste a lot of examples of the difference terroir makes in Champagne. For centuries the standard practice was to blend everything from everywhere to create a consistent "house" style. Now that we have all these great small-production Grower Champagnes available, we see that Champagne is becoming more and more like Burgundy, home to wines that first and foremost express the unique place of their birth.



**Champagne is typically divided into five distinct sub-regions.** This time around we'll have a look at **three** of them - the **Montagne de Reims**, the **Coteaux Sud d'Eprenay** (which is actually a sub-region of the Marne Valley), and the **Aube**.

## **Montagne de Reims**

Generally speaking, this is Pinot Noir territory. All three major Champagne grapes are grown here to some degree, but it's Pinot Noir that dominates. The vineyards are on the slopes surrounding the small villages than fan out to the south, east and west of the city of Reims (pronounced *Rance*), the largest city and winemaking capital of Champagne. The ancient chalk beds run deep under these soils, combining with clay and limestone to bring powerful expressions of Pinot Noir, the best of which come from the Grand Cru villages of Ambonnay and Bouzy.





## Coteaux Sud d'Epernay

The Marne Valley vineyards are strung out along each side of the Marne River, which runs east-west through Champagne and essentially bisects the region. These are generally the coolest spots in Champagne, which is of course already a very cool-climate grape-growing region, just at the margin of being warm enough to effectively ripen grapes.

The **Coteaux Sud d'Epernay** is a small sub-region of the Marne Valley, spread across the slopes of a few tiny villages just south of the town of Epernay. It serves as sort of a transition zone between the Marne and the Côte des Blancs, with the wines from here being distinctively different and thus worthy of their own designation.

All three major Champagne grapes perform well here, but differently from other regions. The Pinot Noir is more refined than in the Marne Valley due to a higher chalk contact in the soils, and the Chardonnay is rounder and richer than in the Côte des Blancs due to the presence of more clay. This may be the best spot of all for Pinot Meunier, which performs exceptionally well here due to the confluence of micro-climate and soils.



## The Aube

Also known as **The Bar**, this southernmost sector of Champagne is perhaps the most dynamic these days, infused with new blood from a new generation of envelope-stretching producers.

Back in the Middle Ages, the Aube was the wealthiest region in Champagne, and the city of Troyes was the center of it all - what Reims and Epernay are today. When the "capitol" of Champagne moved north, the Aube fell out of favor, and the big houses fought aggressively to deny the Aube vineyards the right to the Champagne appellation. It wasn't until 1927 they were finally granted that status.

The Aube is predominantly Pinot Noir, with a scant few hectares of Chardonnay (and a little Pinot Blanc in some villages) among the nearly 20,000 acres of vines here. The Aube is warmer than the rest of Champagne, and the Pinot Noir here regularly attains levels of ripeness not often seen in Champagne's northern sectors. The wines still exhibit the benchmark minerality found throughout Champagne, but the riper and richer Pinot adds more weight on the palate, more vinosity, and more "red wine" qualities to the bubbly. Fascinating stuff indeed.

The terroir is unique in the Aube, as is the climate, when compared with the rest of Champagne. Many of the vineyards are on an underlying bed of Kimmeridgian Limestone - the same soils that make Chablis so special (and the southern-most parts of the Aube are just a few kilometers from Chablis, in fact. Here, one is closer to Burgundy than to Reims!)

**Now then, let's go taste some wines!**



## Laherte Frères - Ultratradition Brut - \$42

*(It's "La-airt" - the H is silent.)* We'll start off this time with three different wines from the same producer, **Laherte Frères**. Laherte has become one of the superstars of Grower Champagne since 7th-generation vigneron **Aurélien Laherte** took over the estate from his dad Thierry some ten years ago. The Lahertes have been on the cutting edge of the "new" Champagne, and were early adopters of practices and techniques - like barrel fermentation, Biodynamic viticulture, and single-site Champagnes - that are now widely accepted, but were definitely "out of the box" thinking not long ago.

All three of these are non-vintage wines, and are from Laherte's estate holdings in their home village of Chavot-Courcourt, the prime hillsides of the **Coteaux Sud d'Epernay**.

These three are consistently among the top NV (Non-Vintage) Grower Champagnes year after year, offering tremendous value for wines of such great precision and complexity. This is not mass-market grocery-story bubbly!

This is a leading candidate for the most complex, refined, intense, and crowd-pleasing NV Champagne on the market. You just don't get this much class in most "entry-level" Champagnes. It's refreshing, serious, and loaded with stone fruits, lemon-lime and seductive flavors that go on and on.

- 60% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Noir, all from Biodynamically-farmed estate vineyards
- 60% from the 2018 harvest, with reserve wines from 2017 & 2016
- Vinified in stainless steel, large oak tanks, and small Burgundy barrels
- Dosage for this disgorgement is 7 g/l



## Laherte Frères - Ultradition **EXTRA-BRUT** - \$42

Here's a great opportunity to understand the difference **dosage** makes (the addition of sugar to the finished Champagne, the last step in the winemaking process prior to packaging and release). This Extra-Brut is the EXACT same wine as the Brut Ultradition above, but with **less sugar added**.

The Brut had **7** grams per liter, with this **Extra-Brut** getting just **4** grams per liter. It may not seem like a big difference on paper, but if you taste these two side-by-side (which I highly encourage) you'll discover a world of difference.

Less sugar brings out more of the minerality and showcases the lively acidity of the terroir, generally speaking. A higher dosage will typically appear sweeter, and accentuate the fruit profile. They're both awesome - see which one you like best!



## Laherte Frères - Rosé de Meunier - \$48

This pale-pink beauty has become one of our absolute favorite bubbly. There are two different methods of making Rosé Champagne, and this one is unique in that it combines **both** methods, something we've not encountered elsewhere.

It's 100% old-vine Pinot Meunier, and a unique product of three different primary fermentations - part is pressed immediately and fermented as a white wine, part is left to macerate with the skins overnight for a touch of salmon-pink color, and a small portion is fermented with the skins as **red** wine. Then all three components are blended together to ferment a second time, this time in the bottle. Three years down the line, the result is in your glass. Pure magique!



## Vincent Couche - Chardonnay de Montgueux- \$62

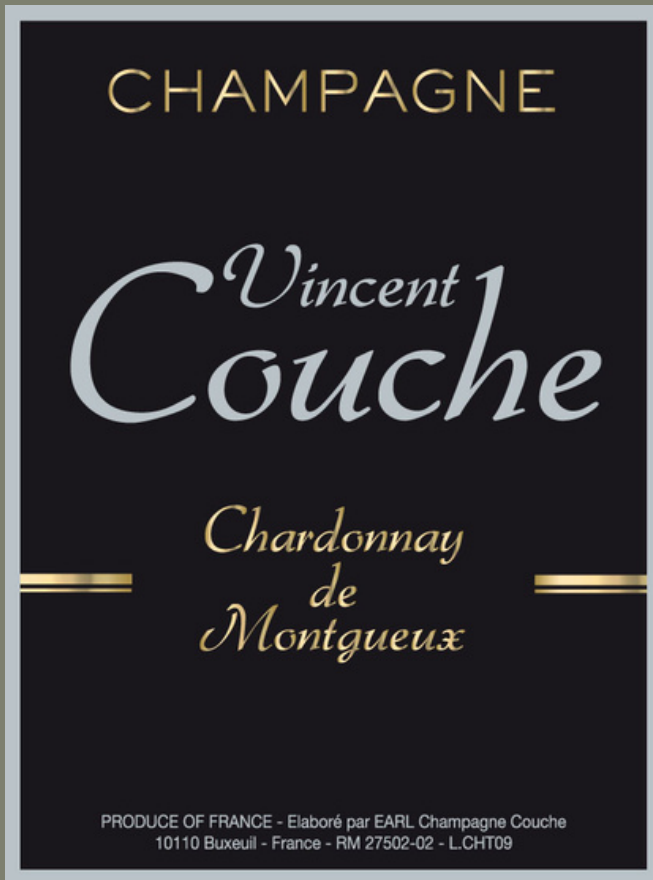
(*Van-sawn Koosh*) is one of a handful of Champagne producers to fully embrace going Biodynamic, meaning his vineyards are farmed holistically with no synthetic chemicals or toxins, and his wines are made with the barest minimum of intervention or additions.

Couche farms 32 acres in the Aube, Champagne's southernmost sector. Most of his parcels are on the hillsides of the village of Buxeuil, and he has one small piece of the magical village of **Montgueux**. The vines here are nearly entirely Chardonnay, as over the centuries it has proven to be one of the true sweet-spots on the planet for it. Along with Mesnil-sur-Oger in the Côte des Blancs, Montgueux is one the spots where the magic often happens. Chardonnay-based Champagnes of great intensity and richness are the hallmark of the Montgueux appellation, and this one is a textbook example. Precision, power, minerality and finesse, all in one stunning package.



**Vincent Couche**

- 100% Chardonnay from the estate parcel in Montgueux
- 44% 2012 fruit, with 56% reserve wines from 2011.
- Fermentation in stainless steel tanks, and Burgundy barrels (27%)
- No Sugar Added - ZERO dosage. This is a Brut NATURE.







**Clotilde Chauvet**



**Nicolas Chauvet**

## **Marc Chauvet** - Millésime 2014 - \$48

Sister and Brother team **Clo and Nico Chauvet** are the current generation at the helm of Champagne Marc Chauvet, an estate that dates to 1529! She makes the wines, he farms the vineyards, and the result is a lineup of gorgeous wines from their 32-acre estate on the **Montagne de Reims**.

They're based in the village of Rilly-la-Montagne, where the vines are on a long, undulating slope facing the city of Reims in the distance (you can see the massive Reims Cathedral from the vines.)

The Chauvets grow all three major Champagne grapes here, but the majority of their plantings are Pinot Noir (as you would expect on the Montagne.) The Chauvet style favors wines that have bright, crisp acidity - so Clo systematically blocks the malolactic fermentation on all wines. (This keeps the malic acid in the wine, the acid that's in apples, rather than letting it convert to lactic acid, the softer, creamier acid that's in milk.) As a result, her dosage levels are typically a bit higher, to gently soften the edges of the crisp acidity.

Chauvet makes two different vintage-dated wines. This one, named "**Millésime**" (that's the French word for Vintage), is a selection of older-vine parcels that they've found to produce wines that deserve a lot of time in the bottle before disgorgement and release.

- 53% Pinot Noir, 47% Chardonnay
- 100% from the 2014 harvest
- Vinification in tank and barrel (7%)
- Over 6 years on the lees in bottle
- Dosage 8.5 grams per liter





## Marc Chauvet - "Initiales" 2012 - \$58

This is Chauvet's signature wine, made only in exceptional years - it's the best of the best of what their estate and cellar can produce. (Up until the 2008 vintage this wine was sold and marketed under the **"Special Club"** designation - Chauvet having been a long-term member of the prestigious group of Growers admitted to the highly selective group (only 25-30 of the 15,000 growers in Champagne are admitted. Chauvet chose to leave the Club, feeling that the group's standards had been lowered.)

They select their best parcels for the fruit that goes into the Initiales bottling, and are dedicated to giving the wine a minimum of 7+ years on the lees. Extra time in the bottle allows for the development of layers and layers of flavors and aromas to emerge, making this an absolutely dazzling wine.



Vintage wines account for just under 10% of Champagne's production, and by law may not be released before 36 months of ageing (the requirement is only 15 months for non-vintage wines.) The best, most serious producers keep their vintage wines even longer before release (and they often hold their NV wines a lot longer as well.)

Clotilde's '12 Initiales is flat-out stunning. 2012 was one of the GREAT Champagne vintages of the last 40-50 years, and this one shows you why. Captivating aromas of white flowers, white peaches and citrus on the palate, and a depth and complexity that keeps inviting you in for another sip. Enjoy one of Champagne's finest!

- 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir from the Chauvet estate
- Tank fermented
- Malolactic fermentation was blocked
- 9 years in-bottle ageing
- Dosage - 5 g/l



**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 Bubbles and Burgundies headed your way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website: **[www.CaveauSelections.com](http://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](mailto:scott@caveauselections.com)** for more information.



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