



Champagne Club

SPRING 2022



The vineyards and the abbey in Hautvillers

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.

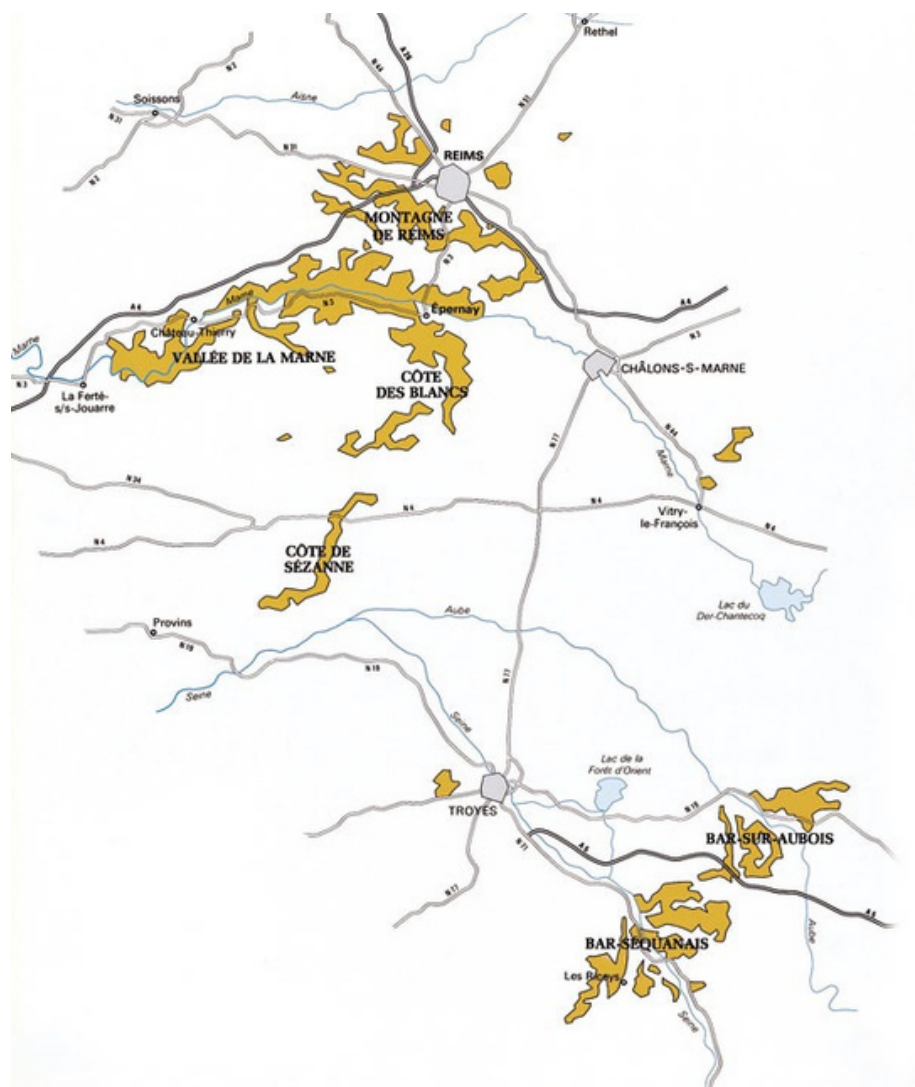
This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (and if you're not already a member, you can sign-up on the website). Also, check-out our new **"House Wine" Clubs** if you're interested in a regular supply of yummy Burgundy at around \$20-\$25 per bottle!

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 is a study in **Blanc de Blancs** - Champagnes that are made only from the "white" grapes, virtually all of which are 100% Chardonnay. Chardonnay is grown throughout the vast Champagne region, and we'll explore examples from five different sub-regions.

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.



Blanc de Blancs Champagne

Most Champagne is “white”, essentially all of it except for Rosé Champagne, which accounts for less than 5% of total production. But all that “white” wine does not come from exclusively white grapes, of course. The “Red” wine grapes Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier make up 72.5% of the vineyard acreage in Champagne, leaving only 27.5% for Chardonnay. When Champagne is produced only from Chardonnay, it is called a **Blanc de Blancs** – literally a “White of Whites”. (It is little-known that there are actually three other white grapes allowed to be grown in Champagne – Pinot Blanc, Petit Meslier, and Arbane. There is a miniscule amount of these grapes planted today, but occasionally you may run across a Blanc de Blancs that contains one or more of these.) All of the wines we’ll be exploring in this package are 100% Chardonnay.

Chardonnay is grown in all of the sub-regions of Champagne, but achieves its greatest success in the aptly named “Côte des Blancs”, the series of villages that run to the south of Epernay. There are six of Champagne’s 17 Grand Cru villages in the Côte des Blancs, each of which has its own unique terroir. In this package we’ll explore Blanc de Blancs wines from different villages in the **Côte des Blancs**, as well as examples from the **Montagne de Reims**, the **Valée de la Marne**, the **Coteaux Sud d'Epernay**, and the **Aube**. Across six different wines you'll get a good illustration of the differences in character and overall profile.

Blanc de Blancs Champagne is a relatively new phenomenon, having appeared for the first time in 1905. It was Monsieur Eugène-Aimé Salon, founder of the now world-famous house of **Salon**, who produced and bottled the first known Blanc de Blancs. Up until the early 1900s Champagne was always blended from about 75% red grapes and 25% Chardonnay. Monsieur Salon was a passionate Chardonnay lover and a purist, and felt the red grapes made Champagnes too heavy. He was looking to accentuate the bright, crisp, citrusy edge of Champagne. Today Salon produces only one wine, and only in the best vintages – a 100% Chardonnay Champagne that is one of the most prized and expensive on the planet.

Blanc de Blancs at their finest can have ethereal lightness, with distinct mineral notes, white floral aromas, along with delicate green-apple and hazelnut flavors. In general it is more feminine style, but can also be made in a style that has more weight and richness – particularly the vintage wines that have aged several years on the lees. Blanc de Blancs, with their crisp and mineral notes, are typically thought of as great complements to fresh oysters and other seafood. With their bright acidity, they are also ideal for cutting through rich foods like foie gras, triple-cream cheeses and charcuterie. We also love them with many spicy asian and latin dishes, and especially with sushi – one of the world’s great food and wine combinations. Blanc de Blancs make an excellent aperitif of course, but really deserve to be thought of as a wine to go with food.

Richer styles of Blanc de Blancs with their nutty, honeyed flavors can even stand up to Pork and Duck. It’s truly a shame that Champagne is so often thought of only as a wine for toasts and celebrations – it just may be the best all-around food wine there is.

Blanc de Blancs Champagnes come in a surprising range of styles, given that they all come from just the Chardonnay grape. The differences are from two main sources. First is the terroir, the place the grapes were grown. Just as important is the winemaking style and preferences of the producer. The textures can run from lean to rich, the flavors from green apples to brioche and truffles. The Dosage – the final addition of sugar added before disgorgement and release (or not added, in the case of Brut Nature examples) makes a huge difference. The wines in this shipment run from 0 to 9 grams per liter of dosage, and you’ll notice that some appear distinctly “drier” and others just a touch “sweeter” (and this perception may not correlate with the level of dosage at all!). Fascinating stuff, indeed!



Chardonnay Terroir in Champagne

Let's start with the **Côte des Blancs**, the villages south of Epernay. This is where it is widely held that the best Chardonnay in Champagne is grown, though this is not to say that excellent Chardonnay is not grown elsewhere in the region. Chardonnay does extremely well in other spots, but perhaps not as consistently as in the Côte des Blancs.

It is of course the soils that make the difference. What makes Champagne as a whole unique is the preponderance of chalk in the soils. If you've ever been to Champagne one of the first things you notice is the damp, chalky walls of the cellars. There are of course many different kinds of chalk here from many different geological eras, and the chalk is mixed in with varying amounts of sand, sandstone, clay, loess, lignite and marl.

In the Côte des Blancs it is a *belemnite* chalk (derived from the fossils of ancient sea creatures) that predominates and gives the Chardonnay its intense and lovely minerality. It is not consistent through each village on the Côte, however. The first two Grand Cru villages at the northern end of the Côte are **Oiry** and **Chouilly**, which are on the edge of the alluvial plain of the Marne river. While both Grand Crus, they are considered somewhat "lesser" than the four Grand Cru villages below them to the south. Oiry is tiny – only 200 acres in all, and it is for all practical purposes 100% Chardonnay. Chouilly is much larger at nearly 1,250 acres – but its Grand Cru status is only for the Chardonnay grown there. There is Pinot Noir in Chouilly as well, but the Pinot is interestingly only granted Premier Cru status.



A few minutes further south and we hit the motherlode - the four Grand Cru villages that are undeniably at the head of the pack. Furthest north of these is **Cramant** (not to be confused with the non-Champagne sparkling wine appellation of Crémant), a village of nearly 800 acres of superb Chardonnay. Then, running south along the D10 road is **Avize**, with some 640 acres of world-class Chardonnay terroir. Next is **Oger** with nearly 940 acres, all Chardonnay, and finally **Le Mesnil-sur-Oger** with its 700+ acres of what many consider to be the best Chardonnay terroir in all of Champagne. Le Mesnil-sur-Oger is home to one of Champagne's greatest and rarest single-vineyard wines, the **Clos du Mesnil**, a monopole of superstar producer **Krug**.

The differences in wines produced from sites in these four great villages is subtly different, with a noticeable gain in intensity and minerality as you go further south. Though they are all Grand Crus, wines from Chouilly in the north and Le Mesnil-sur-Oger in the south could not be more different in character- power and richness in the former, crystalline purity in the latter.



The **Montagne de Reims** is the sub-region of Champagne where Pinot Noir is king, though all of three major Champagne varieties are grown there to some degree. 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 power and intensity to the wines. Certain pockets of the Montagne clearly favor Chardonnay, due to higher chalk content in the soils, exposure of the individual site, or a combination thereof. The Chardonnay from here shares many characteristics with that of the northern Côte des Blancs - meaning more richness and power, and less chalk-driven minerality.

The **Vallée de la Marne** is the part of Champagne where **Pinot Meunier** does its best, though again all the varieties are grown there. No particular village in the Vallée is noted for its Chardonnay, but sections with the highest concentrations of the belemnite chalk perform the best. There is a lot of sand and sandstone in the Vallée, and in some areas the chalk disappears completely. Blanc de Blancs are just a tiny portion of wines made from the villages of the Marne Valley.

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. Chardonnay in the Aube is confined pretty much exclusively to the village of **Montgueux**, an isolated hillside hamlet on the outskirts of Troyes. There, deep pockets of chalk underlie the vineyards, imparting to the wines an intense minerality that rivals the best of the Côte des Blancs.

Let's go taste some wines!



1. Laherte Frères - Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature - \$45

(It's "Lah-airt" - the H is silent.) **Laherte Frères** 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.

Laherte's home base and most of their vineyards are in the village of Chavot-Courcourt, the prime hillsides of a small area known as the **Coteaux Sud d'Eprenay**, a sub-region of the sub-region of Vallée de la Marne. It's not the Marne Valley, and it's not the Côte des Blancs - it's physically between the two, and stylistically unique. Most of the area is prime Pinot Meunier terroir, but certain sectors of the hillsides have proven to be sweet-spots for Chardonnay.

There's more clay in the soils here, along with a softer layer of chalk, which results in great minerality **plus** rich, weighty fruit on the palate.

Always one of our favorite bottles at home, this is a prime example of what great Chardonnay-based Champagne tastes like - without any "makeup" or artifice of any kind. Just pure, unadulterated terroir-driven deliciousness.

- 100% Chardonnay, from Laherte's Biodynamically farmed parcels on the slopes of Chavot - average vine age 35+
- 50% from the 2017 harvest, with 50% reserve wines from 2016
- Vinified in large oak tanks, and small Burgundy barrels, then aged for over 3 years in bottle.
- Malolactic fermentation partially blocked, to preserve the fresh, crisp acidic edge.
- Disgorged in June 2021 with **Zero Sugar** added - BRUT NATURE





2. **Marion-Bosser** Blanc de Blancs Extra-Brut 1er Cru - **\$44**

(*mah-ree-own Boh-sair*) That's winemaker **Élodie Marion**, above left - with her mom and grandmother. Élodie is the 5th-generation of the family to run the estate, and it's always been women in charge (and Élodie's niece is in the wings to take over next!) They're based in the picturesque hilltop village of **Hautvillers**, overlooking the Marne Valley below, and just down the road from the abbey where the legendary monk Dom Perignon plied his trade in the late 1600s. (He's buried under the floor of the church, btw.)

The vineyards in Hautvillers are on a steep, sun-kissed slope, and the grapes benefit from plenty of warmth and light AND the cool breezes coming up the hill from the river. As a result the wines exhibit both ripe, rich fruit and a lovely acidity, exacerbated by the underlying mother-rock of deep chalk. Élodie's winemaking style is classic, and the wines are masterful examples of understated elegance.

She has just a tiny bit of Chardonnay to work with, thus this is her only Blanc de Blancs. I've always thought it's the best wine in her lineup. It's the poster child for a crisp, bright, ethereal and elegant Chardonnay-based Champagne - floral on the nose, citrus on the palate, and purely delightful.

- 100% from the 2015 harvest, though it is not vintage-dated on the label
- Vinified entirely in thermo-regulated stainless-steel tanks
- Aged 4 years on the lees in bottle
- Disgorged in January 2020
- Dosage - 5g/l



3. Marc Chauvet - 2012 Cuvée Duo Blanc de Blancs \$59



The Chauvets (*show-vay*) have been vigneron in Rilly-la-Montagne since 1529 - their ancestors are buried under the church across the street from the winery. It's a brother & sister team in charge this generation - **Clotilde** makes the wines, **Nico** tends the vines, and together they're maintaining a house tradition that spans some 500 years.

We're now in the Montagne de Reims, where Pinot Noir is king, but all three main varieties are planted and perform well. The vines in Rilly-la-Montagne are on north facing slopes, looking directly at the majestic Cathedrale de Reims in the distance. Most of the Chauvet wines are Pinot Noir based, but Clo has always found that two particular parcels of their Chardonnay were consistently outstanding, so she decided to keep them separate and produce a barrel-aged Blanc de Blancs. This 2012 is only the 2nd time they've produced this wine, as they've opted to make it only in the truly outstanding vintages.

It's named "**Cuvée Duo**" as it has two different labels, inspired by original paintings that hang in the Chauvet tasting room at the winery. The wine in the bottle is the same, no matter if you have the "male" or "female" version of the label.



Chauvet's style is to always block the malolactic fermentation, so as to keep the crisp, malic acidity in the wine. As a result, they tend to add a slightly higher dosage, to take a bit of edge off of the acid and bring the wine into harmony. This one is fermented in stainless steel, but then aged in used Burgundy barrels before going into bottle for the 2nd fermentation - adding a richer texture and fuller-bodied mouthfeel to the finished beverage.

This is not a wine to quaff casually - it demands your attention, with bold, rich citrus driven flavors and layers and layers of aromas from it's extended time in bottle. An incredibly complex Blanc de Blancs.

- 100% 2012 Chardonnay from Chauvet's best old-vine parcels
- Base wine fermented in temperature-controlled Stainless Steel tanks, malolactic fermentation blocked by cold stabilization
- Barrel aged 8 months
- Bottled in spring 2013
- Over 7 years ageing on lees in bottle
- Disgorged October 2020, dosage 9g/l



Cécile and Vincent Bauchet

Champagne Pertois-Moriset

4. "Quatres Terroirs" - Pertois-Moriset \$44

(pair-twah mohr-ee-say) Now we'll head over to the **Côte des Blancs**, the sub-region of Champagne where Chardonnay shines its absolute brightest. When Cécile and Vincent Bauchet married, they brought together two family estates with superb holdings in Champagne's most prestigious terroirs. They have over 30 acres of nearly priceless Grand Cru parcels in the Côte des Blancs, the most sought after and most expensive grapes in all of Champagne.

They've invested massively in infrastructure and manpower since taking over, upgrading all equipment, expanding the cellars, fielding the region's first all-electric tractors, and sparing no expense at every turn. The proof is in the pudding, as their wines have quickly developed a devoted and fanatical following.

"Quatres Terroirs" brings together fruit from four of the great Grand Cru villages - **Mesnil-sur-Oger, Oger, Cramant and Chouilly**. The result is a textbook example of what great Côte des Blancs bubbly is all about. Intense limestone minerality, precise lemon-lime fruit, bread dough and floral aromas, and a finish that goes on and on and on. And this is their "entry-level Blanc de Blancs"!

- 100% Grand Cru Chardonnay, based on the 2015 harvest.
- 70% is 2015 fruit, 30% is from the estate's perpetual reserve
- Vinified in tank and large oak foudres, malolactic was blocked
- 5 years on the lees
- Disgorged in April 2021, dosage 2.5 g/l





5. Paul Launois - "Monochrome #4" - \$49



Julien and his wife Sarah took over his father's estate in 2015 and re-named it after their young son Paul. They are blessed with over four hectares of Mesnil-sur-Oger Grand Cru, the most coveted grapes on the planet (with the exception of perhaps Romanée-Conti and Montrachet, *bien sûr!*) For several generations the grapes had been sold to the local cooperative. Julien and Sarah cancelled the co-op contract and kept all the fruit for themselves, and have quickly emerged as one of the most exciting new producers in all of Champagne. Their wines are simply exquisite, and are textbook examples of why Mesnil-sur-Oger is such revered terroir.

Monochrome is the name they've given to their prestige cuvée, to reference that it comes from one village and one grape. "#4" indicates that this is the fourth vintage they've produced this wine, starting with #1 back in 2015.

- 100% Mesnil-sur-Oger Grand Cru
- Based on the 2018 harvest, with 30% reserve wine from 2017 in the blend
- Vinified in stainless-steel tank, with a small portion (5%) in barrel
- Malolactic fermentation completed
- Aged two years on the lees, disgorged in June 2021, dosage 2g/l

Very fine, tiny bubbles bring the precise, chalky minerality to the surface and a delicious salinity to the palate, with notes of buttered brioche and citrus confit that make you want to dive back in for more. I'm a die-hard fan of Mesnil-based wines, and this is a great example why. First class juice!





6. **Vincent Couche** - Chardonnay de Montgueux - \$62

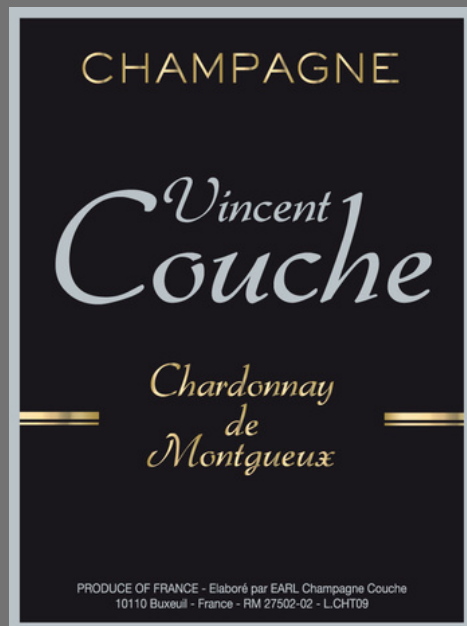
And now we head down south, about an hour and a half's drive south of the Côte des Blancs and into the sub-region known as the **Aube**. The Aube is a sprawling region of many dozens of tiny villages scattered across the hillsides, and the vineyards are dominated by Pinot Noir. There is virtually no Chardonnay in the Aube, except for in the village of **Montgueux**.

It's a new vineyard area, which has really only been planted since the 1960s. And it's small, with just over 500 acres under vine. It's about 15 minutes west of the ancient city of Troyes on a south-facing slope, rising about 350 feet above the valley floor below. Unlike anything else in the Aube, it's basically 100% Chardonnay. The soils here are chalky, having more in common with the Côte des Blancs than with the rest of the Aube, which is on Kimmeridgian limestone. These south-facing slopes always produce rich wines with ripe flavors, but the underlying chalk gives them a lot of minerality.

The dynamic, iconoclastic **Vincent Couche** is a very vocal leader of Champagne's tiny group of Biodynamic farming adherants. Most people still don't think you can farm without toxic chemicals there - citing the long-held beliefs that it's "too cold and too wet". He continues to prove them all wrong, with a range of spectacular wines that have made him a popular (and controversial) figure in Champagne. Most of his vineyards are further south in the village of Buxeuil, where he has nothing but Pinot Noir. His Chardonnay is all from Montgueux, and Blanc de Blancs aficionados have come to recognize that the wines from Montgueux are now rivaling many of the best from up north.

This one knocks me out with hits of rich mango and tropical fruits, and a laser-pure minerality that shares a lot with wines from Mesnil-sur-Oger.

- Based on the 2013 harvest, with reserve wines from 2012 in the mix
- Vinified in a combination of tank and barrels with wild yeasts
- Malolactic fermentation was allowed to complete
- 7 years ageing on the lees
- Disgorged in June 2021 - ZERO dosage - **Brut Nature**



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 Bubblics 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.



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