



Champagne Club

SPRING 2023



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.

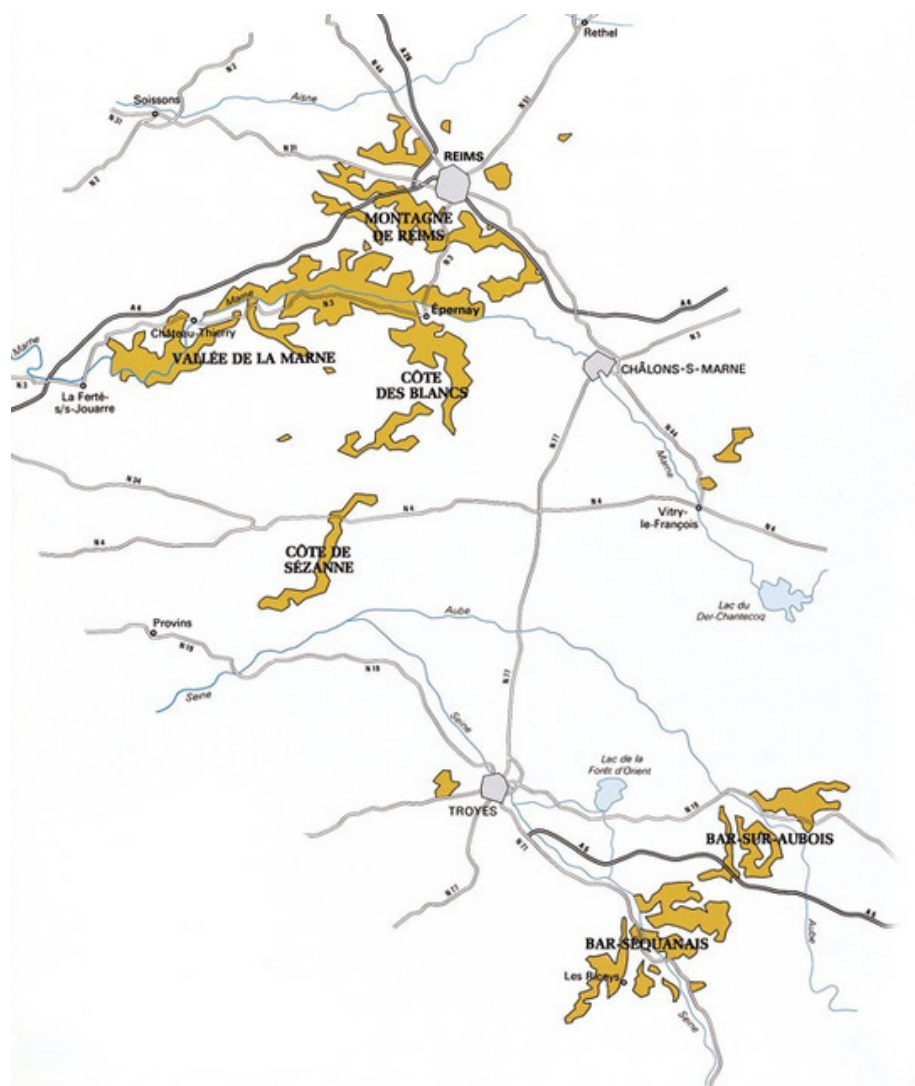
This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (and if you're not already a member, you can sign-up on the website). Also, check-out our **"House Wine" Clubs** if you're interested in a regular supply of yummy Burgundy at around \$20-\$25 per bottle!

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 an **illustrative tour of 6 different sub-regions** of Champagne. We'll be exploring six wines hailing from different sectors - one each from the **Montagne de Reims, Vallée de la Marne, Côte des Blancs, Coteaux Sud d'Épernay**, the **Sézannais**, and the **Aube**.

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, when 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 only about 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.



Yes, it's all "Champagne"...

But the region is not homogeneous at all. The delimited area that's included in the Champagne appellation covers a vast amount of space, with some **83,000 acres** of vines. It can take nearly three hours to drive from the furthest reaches of the Marne Valley to the southernmost parts of the Aube - about how long it takes to drive from Portland to Seattle, for example.

For centuries, most Champagnes were blends that brought together grapes from multiple sub-regions of Champagne - in fact most still are. However, over the last 25 years more and more Champagnes are being produced from single regions or single villages, and more recently single vineyard plots - and this has brought to light the striking and complex differences in the multitude of terroirs that comprise Champagne.

The one thing each of the Champagne sub-regions have in common is that they were all at the bottom of the ocean not too long ago, geologically speaking. When the sea receded and the earth shifted to push up the hills and mountains and the rivers were created, what remained was land that would over millions of years come to contain a preponderance of limestone of various stripes, most often taking the form of **chalk**. Billions of decomposed fossilized sea-creatures are to thank for the wonderful terroir that now brings forth these glorious wines.

All this chalk is mixed in with various amounts of clay and sand in the various regions, and this mix is what accounts for much of the differences in the wines - that of course along with the micro-climatic conditions in each sub-region.

So let's take a look at one wine from each of six different sub-regions, and explore what makes them what they are. **Let's pop some corks!**



Cécile & Vincent Bauchet

1. Pertois-Moriset - *Assemblage* - \$40

(Pare-twah mor-ee-say) We'll start off with a wine from the **Sézannais** region, perhaps the least known and least understood sector of Champagne. It's about an hour's drive south and west of the Côte des Blancs, and traditionally has been an important region that supplied mass-quantities of grapes to large negociant houses in Reims and Épernay. Grapes have been planted there since at least the 11th century, though as in the rest of France all of the vineyards were wiped out by phylloxera in the early 20th century. Most of this region was not replanted until the 1950s or 60s - so we're just at the beginning of starting to understand the terroir here.

There have been very few Grower-producers here, making it even more difficult to have a good understanding of the terroir. The Grower Champagne revolution is now putting some Sézannais wines on the map, and here we have an excellent example.

Champagne Pertois-Moriset is acutally based in the exalted Côte des Blancs, but winemaker Vincent Bauchet's family is from the Sézannais, where they have 18 acres of vines (in addition to their 33 Grand Cru acres in the Côte des Blancs from Cécile's family.)

Nearly 70% of the plantings in the region are Chardonnay, which is favored by the chalky soils that predominate the region. It is far enough further south than the Côte des Blancs for it to be significantly warmer, so the Chardonnay from here tends to be riper and more fragrantly fruity, less mineral-driven than in the Côte des Blancs. The soils are heavier and deeper, with more clay in the mix. 18% of the acreage is planted to Pinot Noir, which also does well here, but is less distinctive. The balance is Pinot Meunier, which is probably out of place in this region.

As for the wine now in your glass:

- 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir
- From five different villages in the Sézannais - **Sézanne, Barbonne-Fayel, Chantemerle, Bethon, and Montgenost**
- It's based on the 2020 harvest, with 25% reserve wines from 2019 & 2018 in the blend.
- Vinified in stainless steel, with reserve wines aged in large oak foudres
- Disgorged in October 2022 after 2+ years on the lees, with a dosage of **2.5 grams** per liter - EXTRA-BRUT

This is one of our favorite bang-for-the-buck Champagnes - there's a lot going on here - it's way more complex than what you'd expect from "entry-level" Champers. In fact it's almost criminal to consider this "entry-level"!

It's immediately accessible and "likeable" - people who think they "don't like Champagne" quickly get seduced by this one. Vibrant with fresh citrus grapefruit, candied lemon, some nice heft from the Pinot Noir, and a refined mousse that make this a bottle that seems to magically disappear rather rapidly.

If this is any indication, the future bodes well for the Sézannais!



Julien Launois

2. Paul Launois *Composition #5* - \$44

Now we'll head up the **Côte de Blancs**, where Chardonnay is King. Many of Champagne's most revered wines - **Krug's** *Clos du Mesnil* and **Salon's** *Le Mesnil* are born here. The great Grand Cru villages of the Côte (with Mesnil-sur-Oger, Oger, Azive, and Cramant leading the way) are home to what many consider the greatest expression of the Chardonnay grape on the planet.

If you want intense minerality, this is ground zero. It's an exceptionally pure bedrock of chalk here that tends to produce wines that are pure, precise and austere in their youth - the best often need 10+ years of ageing to start to show their best. There are 7,765 acres under vine in the Côte, 98% of which are Chardonnay.

Julien Launois (loan-wah) and his wife **Sarah** took over his family estate when his father retired, and renamed the the domaine **Paul Launois** after their young son. These grapes had for generations been sold to the village cooperative - *Le Mesnil*, so it's only since 2015 we've had the pleasure of getting to know and love the Launois wines.

Composition #5 is from a selection of multiple Grand Cru parcels, all in the heart of Mesnil-sur-Oger.

- 100% Chardonnay
- Based on the 2019 harvest, with 40% reserve wines from 2018 (60% of the reserve was aged in stainless steel, 40% in oak barrels).
- Bottled in May 2020, Disgorged in June 2022
- Dosage is **1 gram** per liter - EXTRA-BRUT

Wow! Nothing else on the planet tastes like Côte des Blancs bubbly, and Mesnil-sur-Oger may be the most distinctive of all. The intensity, the subtle salinity, the finesse, the sublime length, and the amazing longevity are all standouts. It's like drinking Grand Cru Chablis that just happens to have bubbles. This is simply outstanding juice!

3. Champagne Heucq - *Fossile* - \$40



Guillaume & Melody Heucq

Now we'll move up to the **Valée de la Marne** - a vineyard region that covers a wide swath of Champagne, spread across the north and south banks of the Marne river, which flows east-to-west through the heart of the vignoble.

It's nearly impossible to characterize the Marne Valley terroir, as it is so widely varied. Parts of it are close to the river, where it is much colder and subject to spring frosts. Some faces north and gets minimal sun, while some faces due south and gets more sunshine than anywhere else in Champagne. Some is at high elevation. Some soils have little or no limestone or chalk. Some parts are closer to Paris than they are to Reims. In other words, it's quite a mixed bag!

One thing most of the Vallée has in common is that it's generally the best sector for the Pinot Meunier grape - which thrives in cooler areas, is more frost-resistant, and finds its best expression on the clay and sandy soils that spread out on each side of the river.

Champagne Heucq (rhymes with "look", the H is silent) is the new (since 2019) incarnation of an old family estate, now in the hands of **Guillaume Heucq** and his wife **Melody**. They're based in *Fleury-la-Rivière*, a higher elevation site on the north bank, up above Cumières and Damery. The soils here vary greatly within the village - going from sandy to stony to clay to limestone - but all tend to be infused with a preponderance of fossilized sea creatures, hence the name of this cuvée.

- 50% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir
- Based on the 2018 harvest, with about 10% reserve wines from 2017 in the blend
- Vinified primarily in steel tanks, with a small portion in barrel
- Over three years on the lees, disgorged in March '22 with 7 grams per liter dosage

A fairly typical upper-east-side Marne Valley wine - the overall impression is freshness and elegance - classic notes of bread-dough and citrus, it's light on its feet and a wine of pure pleasure. The Meunier brings a nice creaminess to the mid-palate and a subtle floral note to the nose. There's a lot here to love!



Aurélien Laherte

4. Laherte Frères - *Ultradition Extra-Brut* - \$52

Next we'll head to the **Coteaux Sud d'Épernay** - the hillsides just to the south of the city of Épernay, which are a sub-region all to their own. They're not part of the Marne Valley, nor are they part of the Côte des Blancs. These slopes sit right in between the two, but are clearly unique unto themselves.

To simply explain the difference, **Aurélien Laherte** (*lah-airt - the H is silent*) states that in the Coteaux Sud *"Our Pinot Noir is finer than the Vallée de la Marne because we have some chalk, and our Chardonnay is rounder and fruitier than the Côte des Blancs as we have some clay."* And the slopes of the villages of Chavot and Courcourt are among the very best sites for a delicious expression of Pinot Meunier. All three main Champagne grapes are grown on the Coteaux, and it's a terroir I've come to adore.

Unless you're pretty new to the world of Grower Champagne. Laherte needs no introduction. Since taking over the family estate, Aurélien has propelled the domaine to fame and renown as one of the premier estates in all of Champagne. His wines are coveted across the globe, and are some of the purest expressions of terroir to be found anywhere in the region.

- 50% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Noir
- Based on the 2019 harvest, with 30% reserve wines in the blend
- Fermentation is in a combination of steel tanks, large oak foudres and small barrels
- Bottled in March 2020, disgorged in June 2022
- Dosage is **3.5 grams** per liter (*this same wine is also released as a BRUT with 7-8 grams of dosage.*)

Is there a better, more complex "entry-level" non-vintage bottling out there? This is a stunning introduction to the Laherte style - all finesse and elegance and fine perfume, bursting with freshness and a near-perfect balance of fruit and minerality. Enjoy!



Sophie Cossy

5. Sophie Cossy- *Sophistiqué* 2013 - \$62

And now on to the **Montagne de Reims**, another far-reaching sub-section with vineyards that can face North, South, East or West, and has no specific regularity to it other than the grape that predominates in most parts is Pinot Noir. The best Pinot is reputed to come from the Grand Cru villages of Bouzy and Ambonnay, but Pinot thrives all over the Montagne. The higher concentration of clay in most of the soils gives the wines body and richness, and most wines from around here are the polar opposite of Champagnes from the Côte des Blancs. These are generally wines of power, rather than restraint.

Sophie Cossy (*Koh-SEE*) is one of the most dynamic winemakers in Champagne today - she's a force of nature. As a young single mom in her 20s, she took over the family estate when her father passed away, and fought the prejudice and nay-sayers to ultimately earn the respect of her peers and the award as Champagne's top winemaker a few years back.

Her vineyards are all in the **Petite-Montagne** section of the Montagne de Reims, a cluster of villages to the west of the city. All three grapes are planted here, and certain sectors are especially excellent for Pinot Meunier, unlike the rest of the Montagne.

This bottling is Sophie's top-of-the-line - bringing together her best old-vine parcels and exceptionally long ageing in the cellar for a towering achievement.

- 40% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Meunier
- All from organically-farmed estate parcels, all from the 2013 harvest
- A full 8 years on the lees prior to disgorgement in May '22
- Dosage is 5 grams per liter - EXTRA-BRUT

Wow. Just wow. Smells like good crusty bread, gun flint, and what a smoky brick bread oven smells like a day after baking pizzas. In the mouth it's all ripe, fresh figs, and layers and layers of subtle flavors that keep evolving sip after sip. Simply a magnificent treat.





Étienne Sandrin

6. Étienne Sandrin - À Travers Celles - \$65

And last but by no means least, we'll head down to the **Aube** - Champagne's wild-wild-west (well, technically it's the wild-wild-south.) A couple hours drive south of Reims, the vineyards have been here for centuries, but were until the 1920s excluded from the Champagne appellation. Grapes from here had been included in wines labeled as Champagne forever, so they rightly won their battle to officially be part of the appellation after years of riots and demonstrations.

It's significantly warmer here than the rest of the Champagne region, but still a very cool site. It's just a few kilometers above Chablis, which is considered the coldest site from which one can reliably get grapes ripe enough to produce still wines. The terroir here is fact the same as in Chablis, on a base of ancient Kimmeridgian limestone, and the combination of the soils and the climate proves to be excellent for Pinot Noir.

(It is our great good fortune to be able to feature a wine from micro-producer **Étienne Sandrin** (*Sawn-drahn*) in your Club package. When we discovered them some 4 years ago and became their first importer anywhere in the world, our entire allocation was a mere 72 bottles!

Sandrin is dedicated to Biodynamic farming, with no chemical input of any kind, and all vineyard work done in harmony with the cycles of the moon. His 5 acres are all on the hillsides of the village of Celles-sur-Ource. The name *À Travers Celles* means "across Celles" - as this bottling is sourced from two separate parcels on opposite sides of the village.

- 90% Pinot Noir, 10% Pinot Blanc
- All from the 2019 harvest
- Vinified in Stainless Steel
- Disgorged in February 2022, dosage is **2 grams** per liter.

The parcel called *Mouille-Brant* brings a ripe, rich, roundness to the wine, while the limestone-driven *Grille-Besace* brings the crisp acidity and the fireworks that make this so delicious and compelling. When all is said and done, this is a bubble of supreme finesse and delicacy, and it deserves a place on your table to accompany a great meal. (Roast chicken and Morels in a cream sauce, anyone?...)

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 Bubbliés 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, visiting regularly since the 1980s, and now spends up to 6 months per year in France. Email **orders@caveauselections.com** for more information.