

# Champagne Club

Spring 2019



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 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.

In this package we have a study of five different **single grape, single vineyard or single village Champagnes**, plus one of the best-value non-vintage blends we've ever found. Let's pop some corks!





map courtesy of The Office of Champagne USA  
[www.champagne.us](http://www.champagne.us)

# One Grape, One Place

In this shipment, we'll take a deep dive into Champagnes that are both site specific and grape specific - a concept that until 15-20 years ago was not even in the conversation in the region. Perhaps the most exciting thing about the "new Champagne" is that we now can clearly see the distinct differences in the vast mosaic of terroirs across the 319 villages that make up the appellation. Historically, over the last 250 years Champagne was primarily a product of blends - not of only of different grapes, but of grapes from many different sites - dozens, if not hundreds of sites in the cases of the big mass-production wines.

That Champagne is now becoming a wine of terroir, a wine that reflects a sense of place, is a gigantic leap forward from where its been. At the current rate, we're not all that far away from Champagne being thought of much in the same way as Burgundy - where the unique character of individual sites is clearly at the forefront.

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**".



# Grower Champagne

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 Négociant 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 négociants. 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 6,500 of these small grower-producers in Champagne, but fewer than 300 of them are available here in the U.S.

## Grower Vs Négociant 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 Négociant Champagne is bad - some of it is flat-out marvelous. Krug, Salon, Bollinger, Roederer, Jacquesson and many others are négociants 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.

# The Land VS The Hand

It is only very recently, as in the last 5-10 years, that the notion of Terroir has seriously entered the conversation when talking about Champagne. The world's most famous sparkling wine has historically been all about winemaking - technique, "House-Style", and the "Art of Blending". We've been told for centuries that where the grapes came from was not a primary concern, it was all about the skill of the winemaker that made the difference.

Now we have hundreds of examples of wonderful Champagnes that are first and foremost a representation of precisely where they come from, and this has been the biggest leap forward since Champagne first became a sparkling wine in the late 1700s. That said, there are of course still human winemakers involved - and a wine of true terroir expression will also bear the mark of he or she who made it.

Just as in Burgundy, where we often find vast differences in wines made from the same vineyard, but by different producers, we can see that it's the combination of terroir and winemaking style/skill that ultimately makes the difference. Farming practices are certainly another significant part of the equation, with the focus on yield-management and the reduction or elimination of toxic chemicals in the vineyards a huge part of the quantum leap Champagne has made in the last 20 years.

*Most people aren't aware of this, but most of what you really need to know about a Champagne is not indicated on the label. Labeling information is getting better and better, but a lot of the labels continue to leave out what should be vital information – the grapes used, base vintage, date of disgorgement, dosage level, etc. I'm on a mission for full transparency in Champagne labeling, and things are definitely moving in the right direction.*

*For centuries the Négociants did not want you to know what was in the bottle, as they claimed it didn't matter! Today's consumer knows better, and is demanding more information, and things are indeed improving. In the meantime, we'll always provide the most complete information available on every wine we import, and go even deeper into it for the wines that we select for the Club.*



# A Grape and a Place

Over the centuries, by the process of trial and error, it became apparent which of the three main Champagne grape varieties (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier) worked best in which places - but that's about as far as it went. Ultimately, grapes and sites were (and still are) routinely blended together with the goal of achieving a homogenous and repeatable "house style". Only recently have we had more than the occasional opportunity to taste what a specific grape from a specific site - either a single vineyard or single village - can produce. To me, this is where Champagne really starts to show its greatest complexity, and quite possibly its finest wines ever.



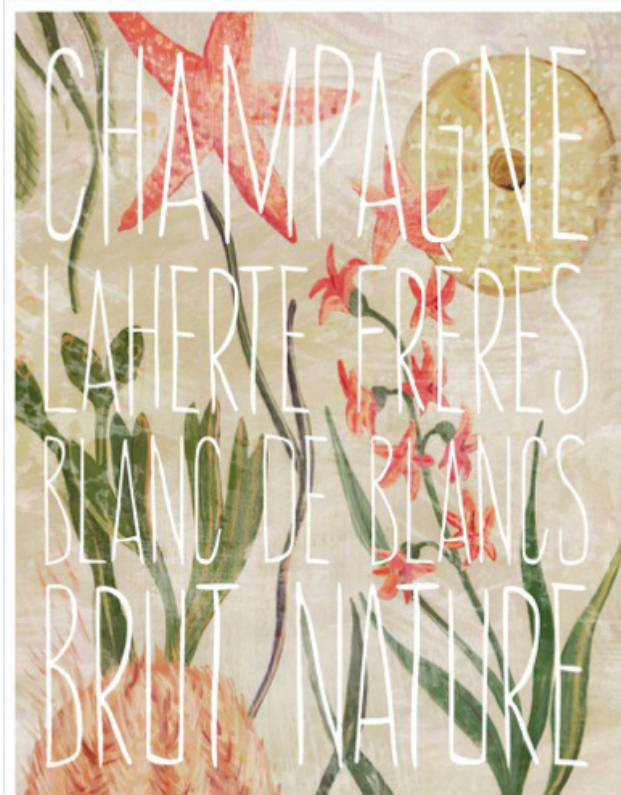
## 1. Champagne Laherte Frères - “Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature”

\$45

**Aurélien Laherte** is one of the leading forces behind the burgeoning terroir movement in Champagne. He’s the 7th-generation winemaker in the family, and has been given free reign to push beyond the edges of the envelope in the pursuit of quality and terroir expression. His dad Thierry was a bit of a maverick in his day as well, having been among the first “radicals” to embrace barrel fermentation for his base wines - you could count on one hand how many producers were using that practice 20 years ago (now it’s quite common among most of the better grower-producers.)

The hillside vineyards south of Epernay are referred to as the **Coteaux Sud d’Epernay**. It’s a special terroir for both Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay. It has more Clay in the soil than the Côte des Blancs, thus the Chardonnay is rounder and fruitier, though still intensely mineral-driven. So here we have 100% Chardonnay from Aurélien’s estate sites in the village of Chavot, on soils of soft chalk and clay. Tasted blind, you’d be hard pressed to peg this as a Brut Nature (no sugar added after disgorgement) - there’s plenty of ripe fruit citrus and apples) swirled in with the prominent limestone minerality.

- Based on the 2015 harvest, with 50% reserve wines from 2014
- Vinified in used Burgundy barrels and large oak Foudres
- Malolactic fermentation partially blocked
- Aged for over two years in bottle on the lees
- Disgorged by hand - December 2018
- Zero dosage





## 2. Champagne Laherte Frères - Les Grands Crayères Blanc de Blancs \$58

This is the first release of this new **single-vineyard wine**. Aurélien noticed that there was one single parcel of their Chardonnay on the west-facing slope of Chavot that had a unique soil, an ancient and very soft *Campanian Chalk*, some 6-7 inches below the surface. In 2014 he decided to make a separate wine from just this site, and the results encouraged him to continue producing it every year thereafter.

It's fascinating to compare this to the Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature - there are many similarities overall, but the essence of liquid minerals is even more distinct and upfront. I find it a touch "brighter", crisper, and definitely more intense overall, with a clean, precise finish that goes on and on and on. A real triumph!

- 100% from the 2014 harvest
- 100% old-vine Chardonnay, field selections (not clones) 50+ years old
- Vinified in used Burgundy barrels
- Malolactic Fermentation completely blocked
- 3 grams dosage
- Disgorged June 2018



### 3. Champagne Paul Launois – “Monochrome” Blanc de Blancs

\$50

Last spring we introduced you to winemaker Julien Launois (below) and his exciting new project Paul Launois, named after his young son. Julien and his wife Sarah took over his father’s estate (formerly known as Champagne Jean-Pierre Launois) - 11 acres of immaculate Grand Cru vines in Champagne’s most prestigious village, Mesnil-sur-Oger.

The bottling from the 2015 vintage, which he’s named “Monochrome”, is the first wine Julien produced from scratch (the “Composition” bottling Club members received last year was Julien’s blend of reserve wines from his dad’s 2011 and 2013 vintages.)

Monochrome does not mean “one-dimensional”. Rather, it refers to the one single and unique “color”, or flavor-shading, that can only come from the intensely chalky soils of Mesnil-sur-Oger, reputed to be the most “mineral” of all the Côte des Blancs villages. You can see why, as this is a superb example. I was fortunate to be able to sit in on the dosage trials for this wine with Julien and Sarah. Always a fascinating exercise, and often an eye-opener in that “less” can indeed be “more”, and vice-versa. I’ve loved following this wine through its evolution. Laser-pure, vibrant and precise - this is rockin’ good juice!

- 100% from the 2015 vintage
- 100% Grand Cru Chardonnay from Mesnil-sur-Oger
- Vinification in stainless-steel tank, malolactic fermentation allowed
- Bottled in July, 2016
- Disgorged June 2018 – 2 years on the lees
- Dosage – 4 g/l



#### 4. Champagne Janisson-Baradon – Toulette 2008

\$69

Another single-vineyard Blanc de Blancs, this one from the hillside vineyards high above Epernay on the western side of town. **Cyril Janisson** and his brother Maxence are the 5th generation at the helm of the family estate, and over the last 10 years they have transformed what was a middle-of-the-road operation into a cutting-edge winery, intensely focused on terroir transparency, low dosage, and wines of great purity. In 2017 we featured their single-vineyard Pinot Meunier “Conges” in the fall package. This year, we’ve got their single vineyard Chard, and a Pinot too!

I begged Cyril to hold the last 300 bottles of this 2008 for us so we could include it in the Club pack. This is a great opportunity to check out a great wine at its peak of maturity.

- 100% from the 2008 harvest
- 100% Chardonnay from a single .74-acre old-vine parcel in the Epernay appellation
- Primary fermentation in used Burgundy barrels, malolactic was blocked
- Over 8 years on the lees in bottle prior to disgorgement
- Dosage 2g/l - Disgorged May 2018
- Only 200 cases produced

All of the extra-time aging in bottle on the lees (dead yeast cells) brings entire new levels of aromas and flavors - bread-dough, fresh-baked brioche, grilled nuts, and a creamy richness on the palate that make this absolutely irresistible. A true “wow” wine. Enjoy!



Cyril Janisson, in front of photos of his grandfather and great-grandfather, in the Janisson-Baradon tasting room in Epernay

## 5. Champagne Janisson-Baradon - “Tue Boeuf” 2012

\$69

At the other end of the spectrum, this is their single-vineyard Pinot Noir. (Yes, the name means “kill the cow”. It’s a fairly common vineyard name found throughout all parts of France, typically used because the site at one time was, or was near to, the local village slaughterhouse. Not very appetizing, I know. But the wine rocks!)

They started experimenting with the ovoid, egg-shaped terra-cotta tanks in 2012. The shape of the vessel keeps the liquid within constantly in motion, as opposed to a static state in traditional cylindrical or square containers. Cyril believes it brings more life, more energy to the wine. We don’t know if that can be proven or not, but the wine in your glass is certainly vibrant, intense, and full-on powerful. Another beautiful example of one grape and one place combining to make one beautiful wine.

- 100% from the 2012 vintage
- Vinified two-thirds in used Burgundy barrels, and one-third in a clay egg-shaped tank
- Malolactic fermentation was blocked
- Disgorged March 2018 - 5 years on the lees
- Dosage 2 grams per liter



Cyril ,showing the Caveau tour group through his Epernay vineyards last June, and showing off one of his prized “Eggs” in the cellar

6. Champagne Pertois-Moriset - l'Assemblage \$35

You may recall we introduced you to Pertois-Moriset and winemaker **Vincent Bauchet** last spring (their “Quatre Terroirs” bottling was in the spring '18 package.) We've had so many requests for more from this producer, and we're happy to oblige. I think this is one of the very best QPR (quality-to-price ratio) Champagnes ever - with big-bucks quality and elegance that blows away most wines in the \$50-\$65 range.

It's not a one-grape, one-place wine - it's a more traditional blend, in this case 50-50 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and all from their holdings in the Sézannais region - south and west of the Côte des Blancs. There's less overt minerality there, but the wines are more crowd-pleasing and user friendly, brimming with fresh, crisp citrus and apples and pure, easy-drinking pleasure.

This has become one of our daily go-to bottles here at the Caveau. Remember, Champagne goes with just about everything - it's not just for breakfast anymore!

- This version is from the 2015 harvest, with some 25% of reserve wine from 2014 in the blend
- 50% Pinot Noir, 50 % Chardonnay, fermented in stainless steel tank and large oak Foudres
- Malolactic fermentation was allowed
- Disgorged June 2018
- Dosage 5 grams per liter



Winemaker Vincent Bauchet, pouring for us at his winery in the Grand Cru village of Mesnil-sur-Oger

# Next shipment in the Fall...

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 Bubbles 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, the founders and former owners of top Oregon Pinot Noir producer Scott Paul Wines. 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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