



scott paul  
wines

## Champagne Club!

Spring 2014

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

This club functions just like our **Burgundy Club** (*and if you're not already a member, call Kelly Karr at 503-319-5827*). 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 and enjoy them. Whichever path you choose – there's lots of good bubbly in your future!

This shipment is a study in **Vintage Champagne**. Less than 10% of Champagne is vintage-dated – meaning that the grapes were all from a single year's harvest. Most Champagnes are blends from two or more years, a tradition arrived at over the centuries as a method of keeping the wines more consistent from year to year. In years where the quality is exceptionally high, producers will often make a small amount of wine from that year's fruit on its own. It is up to the individual producer to decide – some producers will make a vintage wine in years when others may chose not to.

For those of you new to the club, or if you just want to brush up, we'll review the Champagne basics first. If you're already up to speed on all that, feel free to skip ahead to all the info specific to this shipment...



## Grower Champagne

We import exclusively, and this club features exclusively, **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.

The big names that you are likely familiar with – Moët et Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Mumm, Roederer, 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 nearly 5,000 of these small grower-producers in Champagne, *but fewer than 150 of them are available here in the U.S.!*

Most negociant Champagne is mass-produced, often over-priced, and can be quite lacking in character. (A very small portion of it however, is outstanding, and in fact can be among the best in all of Champagne.) Negociant Champagne is hugely successful, and is certainly the world's most celebrated wine.

Unfortunately, most of it just isn't very good. They produce 88% of the wine, but own only 12% of the vineyards. Their production methods are designed to bring the wines down to a lowest common denominator. Hence our motto – ***Friends don't let friends drink negociant Champagne!***



## Champagne 101

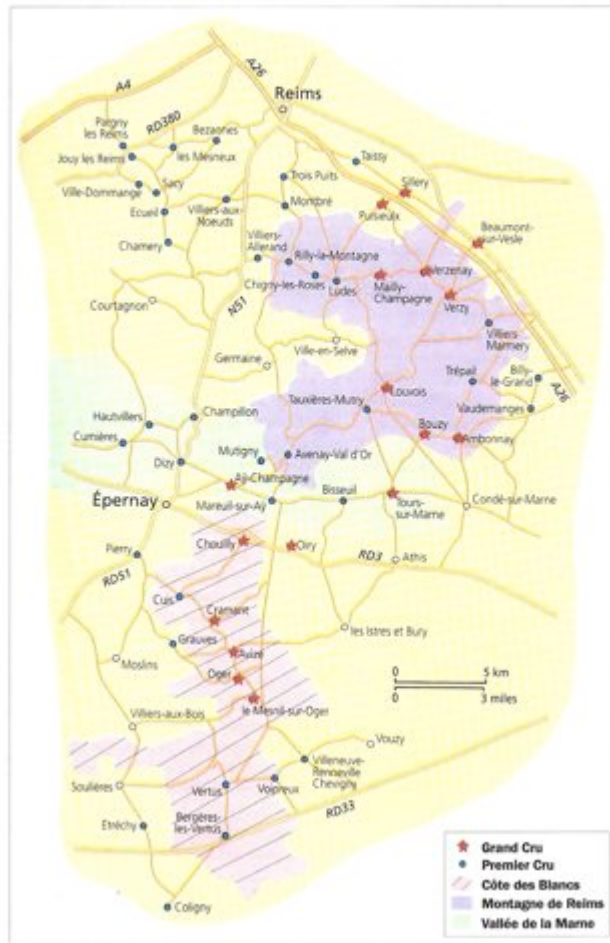
- Champagne is the largest AOC (**A**ppellation d'**O**rigine **C**ontrôlée) in France. It covers a whopping 76,000 acres of vineyards, across 319 small villages and towns. Only wine made from this delimited area can be called Champagne. Sparkling wine made from other regions in France carries the appellation *Crémant*.
- There are nearly 20,000 vineyard owners in Champagne. Only about 5,000 of them produce wine from the grapes they grow. The other 15,000 sell all of their grapes to the large negociant houses.
- There are five distinct sub-regions of Champagne:
  - **Montagne de Reims** – Encompasses several villages surrounding the city of Reims (pronounced “Rance”). Pinot Noir is the predominant grape grown here, but there is significant Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier as well.
  - **Valée de la Marne** – Many villages strung along the Marne river, which cuts across Champagne from East to West. The largest percentage of acreage is planted to Pinot Meunier.
  - **Côte des Blancs** – As the name suggests, this is white grape territory. Virtually everything in this sub-region is Chardonnay.
  - **Côte de Sezanne** – A region on the rise. All three grapes are grown here.
  - **The Aube (or the Côte des Bar)** – An area on the rise, with a new generation of quality-focused growers emerging. This is where much of the most exciting, cutting-edge Champagne is coming from.

The first three regions listed above account for the vast majority of Champagne production, though the Côte de Sezanne and the Aube are growing rapidly.

Below is a map with a good overview of the entirety of the Champagne appellation, followed by a map focusing on the three main sub-regions.



## Map of Champagne



- Vineyard classification is radically different in Champagne than in Burgundy. In Burgundy, it is each individual piece of vineyard land that is classified. In Champagne, the *entire village* is classified – every vineyard within the boundaries of a village is given the same classification (though in fact certain sites within the village are clearly better than others, so this is a seriously imperfect system).
- Each village is given a numerical rating, on a scale of 100 percentage points. Champagne village ratings are as follows:

**Grand Cru** – Villages rated 100%

**Premier Cru** – Villages rated 90-99%

**Deuxième Cru** - Villages rated 80-99%

There are only 17 Grand Cru villages – noted in red stars in the map above. The most familiar names among them would be *Bouzy*, *Ambonnay*, *Oger*, and *le Mesnil-sur-Oger*.

The percentage points refer to the price paid for grapes from each village by the negociants. Say the top-line price for a ton of Pinot Noir is set at \$4,000 for this vintage. If you were selling grapes from a vineyard in a Grand Cru village, you would receive 100% of that price, the full \$4,000. If you were selling grapes from a Premier Cru village rated at 95%, you would receive 95% of the top price, or \$3,800 in this case.

- There are three main grape varieties grown in Champagne:

**Pinot Noir** – which accounts for 37.5% of all plantings

**Chardonnay** – which accounts for 27.5%

**Pinot Meunier** – which accounts for 35%

- Additionally, there are four “other” grapes allowed in Champagne, but they are rarely seen today. They are – *Fromenteau*, *Petit Meslier*, *Arbanne*, and *Pinot Blanc*
- Pinot Meunier is a grape little seen outside of Champagne. It is extremely valuable as a blending grape, and adds lovely aromatics and light-bodied fruit to the wines, but is not often used on its own, neither in Champagne nor in still wine.
- Most Champagne is a blend of two or more of the varieties, though some are made from only one of the grape varieties.
- There are four main categories of wine in Champagne –

**“Champagne”** – made from a blend of two or three of the grape varieties, using both colors – i.e. Chardonnay and at least one of the two Pinot varieties

**“Blanc de Blancs”** – made exclusively from white grapes – i.e. 100% Chardonnay

**“Blanc de Noirs”** – made exclusively from the red (also known as “black”) grapes, either singly or a combination of the two.

**“Rosé”** – made from any combination of two or three of the varieties. The pink color is obtained either by blending in a portion of red still-wine, or by letting a portion of the juice macerate with the skins of red grapes.

- But it's all "white"! Yes, it is. It's important to remember that the juice from all wine grapes is clear – it is only if you let the skins soak together with the juice that one gets any color from the "red" wine grapes. For Champagne, the Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes are treated just like the Chardonnay, in that the juice is pressed out immediately, and the juice is never in contact with the skins. Hence, "white" wine from red grapes.
- In addition to the four main categories of Champagne listed above, there is another classification based on the amount of residual sugar in the wine. (We'll explain in detail later the mechanics of this. For now just know that at the end of the winemaking process, varying amounts of sugar are added to most Champagnes.)
- The Seven Levels of Sweetness:

**Brut Nature** (Also known as Brut Zero, Ultra Brut, Brut Sauvage) – less than 3 grams per liter

**Extra Brut** – Less than 6 grams/liter

**Brut** – Less than 12 grams/liter

**Extra-sec** – 12-20 grams/liter

**Sec** – 17-35 grams/liter

**Demi-sec** – 33-50 grams/liter

**Doux** – 50+ grams/liter

- In addition to all of the above classifications and categories, Champagnes also fall into one of the two following designations –

**VINTAGE** – A vintage Champagne is primarily, and sometimes entirely, from grapes grown in only one year. The appellation laws require a vintage-dated wine to be a minimum of 85% from the stated vintage – the other 15% can be from one or more other vintages. A producer may produce a vintage wine from whatever vintages he or she wishes – though most will not make vintage wine in the lesser quality years. It is up to the individual producer to decide whether a vintage wine will be produced in a given year. Vintage wines must age a minimum of three years prior to release. Only 10-15% of all Champagne is vintage-dated.



**NON-VINTAGE** – 85-90% of all Champagne is non-vintage, meaning that the wine is a blend from grapes grown in two or more years. It is often said that the essence of non-vintage Champagne is the art of blending – using many different components and building blocks to arrive at a consistent flavor profile and character (or lack thereof).

## History

Before we dive into the winemaking process, let's take a look at a little history.

- Champagne hasn't always been a sparkling wine! Until the late 1600s, Champagne was exclusively a still red wine, made from the Pinot Noir grape. (Thus making Champagne a major competitor to Burgundy. The two regions were in fact bitter enemies throughout the centuries.)
- *Dom Perignon*, the monk widely credited for "inventing" Champagne (and now a brand-name used by Moët et Chandon for their luxury brand), was actually charged with the mission to "stop the bubbles" from happening in the wines! He was the cellar master at the Abbey of Hautvillers in the late 1600s, when the monks grew tired of losing 15-25% of their wines every year to unwanted fermentations that were occurring in the bottle. (The bottles were literally exploding in the cellars.) Instead of "stopping" the bubbles, Dom Perignon figured out how to control the process. His biggest contribution was actually coming up with the use of corks to close the bottles, which replaced the hemp-rag shoved into the bottle neck with a plug of wood.

## Méthode Champenois

The *Méthode Champenois* is the intricate, expensive, time-intensive and labor-intensive process by which all Champagne is made. There are of course many others ways to make sparkling wine – but none of them produce results with anywhere near the quality of this method. It was arrived at by trial and error, like all winemaking practices over the centuries. The main point of difference from any other method is that wine produced this way *undergoes a second alcoholic fermentation in the bottle* – thus each bottle is its own unique fermentation vessel. Here's a step-by-step look at the process...

- All grapes are harvested by hand – picking machines are not allowed
- The grapes are pressed as soon as possible after picking. The press is filled with whole bunches of grapes, and the clear juice is pressed out directly into tanks
- The juice from the first pressing, the best quality juice, is in Champagne lingo called the *Cuvée*. Most grower Champagnes use only this top quality juice. Lesser quality juice from the 2<sup>nd</sup> pressing is termed the *1er Taille*,



and is often used by the large negociants in their mass-market bottlings. A 3<sup>rd</sup> pressing produces an even lower quality juice that is called the *2ème Taille* – and is only used in the French equivalent of André's Cold Duck.

- *Débourbage*. The juice is chilled to about 38 degrees, and allowed to settle for a day or two, in order to clarify the juice and to separate the juice from any solids
- The clear juice is then transferred into temperature controlled tanks for fermentation. Most grower Champagne is allowed to ferment using only the wild, indigenous yeasts, while most negociant Champagne is inoculated with cultured, commercial yeast. A cool fermentation (at 65-68 degrees) ensues, lasting 3-10 days. (A very tiny amount of Champagne is fermented in oak barrels – only a small percentage of producers employ this technique.)
- Champagne grapes at harvest rarely exceed 10-11% potential alcohol due to the extremely cool climate in which they're grown. If the grapes were harvested at lower potential alcohol levels, the producer may chaptalize – add sugar to the juice during fermentation – to bring the alcohol level up to 10.5-11% when fermentation completes.
- After the primary alcoholic fermentation, malolactic fermentation is allowed to happen in most cases. Malolactic fermentation is a naturally occurring process that converts the sharp, crisp malic acid – the acid that's in apples, into the softer lactic acid – the acid that's in milk. Some producers choose to block the malolactic fermentation, preferring to keep their wines higher in acidity.
- When the malolactic fermentation is complete, you then have a very acidic and not so pleasant tasting base wine, called the *Vin Clair*. At this stage it tastes green, harsh, and fairly astringent. It is hard to believe that it will one day be transformed into the delightful beauty that we know as Champagne!
- Next comes the *assemblage* – the blending of different *Vins Clairs*, selecting how much Chardonnay, or Pinot Noir, or Pinot Meunier to use in the blend (the different grapes are pressed and fermented separately), how much wine from this vintage, how much from previous vintages, etc.
- Then the final blend is put into bottles. A calculation is made as to how much sugar needs to be added to bring the alcohol level to approx. 12% after the next fermentation.
- Now the *Liqueur de Tirage* is added to the bottled wine. This is a blend of sugar, yeast, and wine. The bottle is closed with a crown cap – like on a bottle of beer or Coke. The bottles are then laid on their sides – *sur lattes* – in a cool (50-55F) cellar, and the second fermentation occurs in the bottle – a process that is simply the yeasts eating the sugar, which produces CO<sub>2</sub> and alcohol. This second fermentation, called the *Prise de Mousse*, will take about three months. The alcohol level will rise to about 12% after this fermentation.

## Stacking the bottles *Sur Lattes* for fermentation –



- When the second fermentation is finished, a sticky sludge of dead yeast cells will have dropped out of the liquid and attached itself to the walls of the bottle.
- The process called *Rémouage*, or Riddling is next – slowly and methodically turning the bottles several times per day and tilting them at increasing angles, so eventually the bottles are fully upside down, and all of the yeast sediment has moved and settled onto the inside of the crown cap. Done by hand, this process takes 8-12 weeks. Mechanical gyro-pallettes can now do the riddling in about 7 days – and most negociants do all of their riddling mechanically these days. Many growers still do it by hand, or at the very least for their top of the line bottlings and all of their magnums and large formats.

Riddling by hand –



Or by gyro-palette –



Here's a look at the sediment as it nears the end of *remouage* –



- Once the yeast sediment has finally all moved onto the cap, the bottles are stored on their heads – *sur pointes* – and aged for a minimum of 12 more months for non-vintage Champagne, or about 30 months minimum for the vintage stuff
- The producers may choose to age their wines much longer than the minimum. The longer the wine ages on its lees – the yeast sediment – the more richness and flavor development will occur. Some top bottlings are aged 10+ years before release.
- When the decision has been made to release the wine, first the yeasty sludge needs to be removed from the bottle. But how do you do that?
- It's an ingenious process called *Dégorgement* – or Disgorging. The bottles are placed neck-down for just a minute or so into a solution of freezing brine. This freezes the yeast sediment along with the first inch or so of liquid in the neck. And turns it into a firm, slushy pellet.
- Then the crown cap is removed. And the slushy pellet (along with a few drops of wine) is forced out of the bottle by the pressure of the CO<sub>2</sub> gas in the wine.

**A look at the frozen pellet just prior to disgorging –**



- Then, immediately after the ejection of the pellet, the *Liqueur d'Expédition* is added – otherwise known as the Dosage. This is the slurry of Brandy or wine and Cane Sugar that determines the level of sweetness in the Champagne – as detailed above in the Seven Levels of Sweetness.
- And finally the Champagne is corked, the wire cage is applied to make sure the cork stays in, and the bottle is foiled, labeled, boxed, and readied for shipment.
- The disgorging, addition of the Liqueur d'Expédition, and the corking-foiling-labeling process is all done at the same time on an automated line, ensuring consistency from bottle to bottle. (Consistency used to be a huge problem in the past, when all of these processes were carried out by hand, a practice that continued until the 1970s.)
- The finished product is a bottle that contains between 40 million and 250 million bubbles – the product of all the CO<sub>2</sub> gas trapped in the wine from the in-bottle fermentation. When the cork is popped, the bubbles are released (and the party has begun)!
- Other than that, it's a pretty simple process 😊



## Six Vintage Grower Champagnes!

The small Grower-Producers don't make much wine – 2,500-3,500 cases per year on average. With no more than 10-15% of that being vintage dated – you can quickly see that we're dealing with wines made in very tiny quantities. It took more than a little begging and pleading to obtain sufficient quantities to fill this Club package, but I was determined to give you a rare look at six different micro-production vintage bubblers.

The AOC rules require vintage Champagnes to be aged for a minimum of 36 months before disgorgement and release, but most top quality producers will often hold their vintage wines for much longer. In this package you'll taste a range – wines that were aged from four years up to nine years. It's fascinating to see the difference this makes. You'll also be tasting wines from five different vintages – 2002, 2005, 2006, 2008 & 2009.



A morning's hard work in the cellar...

Traditionally, Vintage Champagne was produced only in superior years, when the producer thought that they had something very special and worthy of showcasing on its own. That mentality has mutated somewhat in the last 10-15 years, concurrent with the rise in Grower Champagne. (Remember that most of these growers until relatively recently were selling most if not all of their grapes to the negociant houses.)

As these small growers started producing their own wines, some have embarked on a program of producing a vintage wine in most years, and some even are doing it every year. Quite often it's done to showcase a particular vineyard from year to year, or just to capture the nature of the individual year on its own. If you talk to 100 different growers you'll get 100 different takes on this topic. Ultimately, it's a very individual thing. We're the lucky beneficiaries, as we get to taste more vintage-specific and terroir-specific Champagnes than ever before.

Champagne growing and making is so much more complex than for still wine. Blending multiple grapes, often from multiple vintages, two fermentations, sugars, yeasts, endless stylistic choices – it gets mind-boggling. One thing in common with still wine production is that the nature of the year, the weather during the growing season, matters a lot. From one year to the next the levels of sugar ripeness and acidity can fluctuate wildly. Even with all the processes and manipulations that Champagne goes through, the nature of the raw material is just as important to the quality of the finished product as it is in Burgundy, or Oregon, or anywhere great wines are grown and made.

It's important to mention here **that all Champagne is ready to drink upon release** – the ageing has been done for you at the winery. While there are a handful of Vintage Champagnes that might benefit from further ageing in your cellar, there is no need. You can of course store them for many years, but there is generally not much benefit to doing so. (Exceptions would be vintage wines from Krug, Salon, Bollinger and perhaps a few others. If you have those, let me know – I'll be happy to come help you check them out!)

Vintage Champagne gives us the clearest possible picture of what the year in question was all about in terms of quality, character and personality. So let's pop some corks and dive in – this is going to rock!





# The Wines

Six wines, five different producers, five different vintages. Some are as different as night and day, all are flat-out delicious. Let's start down in the south...

## 1. 2009 Extra-Brut – Pierre Brigandat

\$55 CLUB \$46.75

- 100% Pinot Noir
- 40% Chardonnay
- Dosage 3.2 g/l
- Fermented in stainless-steel tanks
- Disgorged May 2013

We start off on the true frontier of Champagne. Pierre Brigandat planted his vines on a south facing hillside in the village of Channes back in 1965. These are THE southern-most vineyards in Champagne, on the very edge of the appellation limit. Go across the road a couple kilometers and you'd be in Chablis. These vines are actually on the same soils and terroir – Kimmeridgian limestone – that are the heart and soul of Chablis. What makes Chardonnay grown in Chablis so intensely mineral-infused and stony makes the Pinot Noir bright and lively and perfumed in Channes – a fascinating study in terroir indeed.

This area was covered with vines before the World Wars, and growers here in the Aube always sold their grapes to the big negociants in Reims and Epernay. The wars destroyed much of Champagne, and the vineyards around here were left in ruins, and were not replanted in earnest until the 70s and 80s. Monsieur Brigandat was one of the first to replant, as well as one of the first to bottle his own production.



**Bertrand Brigandat**

His son Bertrand joined the estate in '93 and took control in 2001, and has quickly become one of the most exciting “under the radar” producers in Champagne. One of my all-time favorite memories is of the first time I visited the estate, lunching with Bertrand and his parents, farmhands and neighbors in their “summer kitchen”. It’s a funky glassed-in kitchen and dining room combo in the middle of the back yard, complete with an open fire with an ancient kettle suspended above, and dogs lapping meat juices out of the pan on the stove. But I digress...

This is the youngest wine in the package, a 2009. It was aged just under four years *sur lies*, and disgorged in May 2013. In a word or three, 2009 produced wines that are ripe, radiant, and seductive. Atypically ripe, in fact – there is a richness of fruit we rarely see in Champagne – it was a year where the base wines were actually pleasurable to taste, as opposed the harsh, astringent *vins clairs* from most years. Not everyone decided to make a vintage wine in 2009. Those that did liked the way the fruit presented itself – fresh and juicy. Bertrand thinks he picked his fruit at the perfect moment, capturing the ripeness without going over the top and getting too heavy. His gentle touch in the cellar allowed the fruit to shine through with a crystalline clarity, and still retain his trademark style of elegance and finesse. In a word, yum.



## 2. 2005 Vieilles Vignes – Francis Cossy

\$59 CLUB \$50.15

- One-third each Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier & Chardonnay
- From estate parcels in Jouy-lès-Reims
- Vinified in stainless-steel tanks
- Dosage 6 grams
- Disgorged April 2013

Sophie Cossy, now 30, took over the family estate five years ago when her father passed away prematurely. She had been working with her dad in the vineyards and cellar for a number of years, and was obviously a quick study. The wines have been going from strength to strength every year under her command. She's in the process of re-designing the labels, and ultimately the new brand name will be simply "F. Cossy".

It was the late monsieur Cossy who grew the grapes and made this wine in 2005. Sophie decided on the dosage and when to disgorge and release it. As is the norm for the Cossy basic non-vintage Brut – this wine is equal parts Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier, all from the family's 1er Cru holdings in Jouy-lès-Reims on the western edge of the Montagne de Reims. For the vintage wine in '05 they chose to use only the old-vine parcels, averaging 40+ years of age.



*Sophie Cossy in her tasting room in Jouy-lès-Reims*

2005 was a bit of a mixed bag in Champagne. More rain than average created mildew issues in some areas, but the fruit was quite ripe and tended to produce some very forward flavors with less acidity than normal. The non-vintage wines that were based on 2005 juice were sometimes overripe. What the 2005 vintage wines needed was time, and that's what Sophie gave it. 8 years in the bottle before disgorgement, and we have a wine of gracefulness that has absorbed its youthful exuberance and strength of fruit.

Telltale characteristics of a Champagne that's been on its lees for an extended time are the distinct and pronounced yeast-brioche-bread dough-toasted nuts aromas and flavors. All those dead yeast cells in contact with the wine over time give the wine an incredible depth of flavor, and indeed a very different flavor palette from that of young, non-vintage Champagnes. At any rate, we see that "yeast & nuts" thing very clearly in this wine, and I personally love it!

This one you can drink now with great pleasure, or hold for a few more years if you'd like. (Champagne is more sensitive to storage conditions than any other wine. To properly cellar Champagne, you need a constant cellar temperature (55 degrees, plus or minus), darkness, 70% humidity, and lack of vibration. Champagne also doesn't like to be moved around a lot.)



*Wintertime in the vineyards on the Montagne de Reims*

### 3. 2006 Millésime – Marc Chauvet

\$59 CLUB \$50.15

- **48% Pinot Noir, 52% Chardonnay**
- **100% 1er Cru**
- **Fermented in stainless-steel tank**
- **Malolactic fermentation was blocked**
- **Dosage 12 g/l**
- **Disgorged September 2013**

Winemaker Clotilde Chauvet and her viticulturist brother Nicolas run the family estate in Rilly-la-Montagne, an estate that dates to 1529. Their vineyards are all in the village, where they grow only Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The village of Rilly-la-Montagne lies right in the heart of the Montagne de Reims, approximately half-way between Reims and Epernay.

The Chauvet style is focused on the crisp and bright citrus flavors end of the spectrum. Thus, they choose to block the malolactic fermentation in the base wine, in order to keep the fresh and lively malic acidity. 2006 was reputed to be an excellent year, with good ripeness and acidity in a nice balance. While the fruit was indeed ripe, over time a distinctly chalky-minerally edge has emerged to complement the fruit richness, making the wines even more compelling.

This wine has the highest dosage of the six in the package at 12 grams, but you will probably not perceive it as sweeter, or if you do it would be just slightly so. That's due to the blocked malolactic fermentation. Quite often the non-malo Champagnes are given higher levels of dosage, simply to take the edge off of the sharpness of the malic acid. (However, you will see some producers blocking malo while also using little or no dosage – you have to have very ripe fruit to pull that off.)



*Disgorging by hand in the cellar at Chauvet*



The end result here is a delicious wine that packs great intensity of flavor into a very fresh and lively package, with the added bonus of nearly seven years of bottle ageing that brings layers and layers of aromas and flavor.



*The 1970s insignia of the Special Club producers*

#### 4. 2005 Special Club – Marc Chauvet

\$69 Club\$58.65

- **70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir**
- **From the estate's oldest vines in Rilly-la-Montagne**
- **All stainless-steel fermented**
- **Dosage – 5g/l**
- **Disgorged September 2013**

“Special Club” is the name used for the top bottlings produced by members of the “Club Trésors de Champagne”. Founded in 1971, it consists of a group of 25 of the top small grower-producers in Champagne. If a member of the group believes they have produced something of outstanding quality, they then submit it to the rest of the members for peer review. The wines are reviewed twice, first as still wines, and then after three years in the bottle. If the wine receives unanimous approval in both tastings, it can then be released under the Special Club moniker. It represents the ultimate offering from the domaine in a given year. Special Club wines must be 100% estate grown, and are only produced in exceptional years.

As we've discussed above, the 2005s showed a lot of power and ripeness when young. Now, with eight years in the bottle, the richness has tamed down and has evolved into grace and freshness, something we would not have anticipated early on with the '05s. It has become a wine of finesse, with notes of exotic fruits and honey on the long and vibrant finish. Flat-out gorgeous on its own, and perhaps even more magical with food. Enjoy!

An interesting side-note – the Chauvets have decided to leave the “Club”, primarily because they don't care for the new labels and packaging that all Special Club wines must share. Their final Special Club release will be their 2006. They will continue to produce a “special” cuvée in exceptional vintages, but it will no longer carry the Club designation.



*Champagne and Charcuterie chez Chauvet*



## 5. 2008 Special Club – Forget-Chemin

\$65 CLUB\$55.25

- 50% Pinot Noir, 50% Chardonnay
- 100% tank fermented
- Dosage 8g/l
- Disgorged April 2012

Thierry Forget is the fourth generation of the family to head the estate, based in the village of Ludes (just down the road from the Chauvets in neighboring Rilly-la-Montagne.) Their vineyard holdings total 30 acres, but they are spread out over 60+ different parcels in 10 different villages. Forget-Chemin is one of the original 1971 members of Champagne's "Special Club". Thierry's wines tend toward the ethereal, elegant end of the spectrum – he's always looking for complexity and nuance over power and intensity.



*Thierry Forget*

I had the opportunity to taste three different versions of this cuvée last fall – he was doing a study comparing different corks. (Most top Grower-Producers in Champagne have switched to a synthetic cork, the brand name of which is Mytik, though several continue with the traditional natural corks.) We tasted the same wine that had been closed with a natural cork, the standard-model Mytik closure, and a new variation from Mytik that is supposed to more closely mimic a natural cork in terms of oxygen permeability. The differences were quite distinct. The natural cork version showed clean and bright, the standard Mytik version had clear notes of mushrooms and licorice, and the new-model Mytik was clearly the best of the bunch – my notes said “creamy, citrus, toast and butter, really gorgeous.” Many similar trials are going on throughout Champagne, with each grower trying to zero in on which closure is best for their wines. It is, as you could imagine, a very complex issue.



***A double-dose of Forget-Chemin Special Club!***

2008 was quite simply a superb year in Champagne. No weather issues, all three major grapes did very well, and the resulting wines show an appealing balance of concentration and acidity. This one is still a baby, only five years on the lees, but beautifully balanced and absolutely ready to please right now.

## 6. 2002 Millésime – Vincent Couche

\$59 CLUB\$50.15

- 50% Pinot Noir, 50% Chardonnay
- Part fermented in stainless-steel tank, part in neutral barrels
- Disgorged April 2012
- Dosage 7g/l

Young Vincent Couche is one of the “young lions” of Champagne, leading the charge in Biodynamic viticulture and out-of-the-box winemaking. Most of his vineyards are in the tiny village of Buxeuil, and his Chardonnay parcel is in Montgeux just outside the fascinating medieval city of Troyes (all of which are in the Aube – the southernmost section of Champagne – about a 2-hour drive from Reims.)

Vincent’s work in the vines is meticulous, and he does most of it himself, by hand. Walking through the vineyards with him, you get the feeling that he knows every plant intimately. He has recently added on to and renovated his winery in Buxeuil, and his barrel cellar is underneath his house in the neighboring village of Gyé-sur-Seine.



*Lunch-time tasting at Vincent Couche*



Vincent likes to ferment in both tank and barrel, and then combine the two. He also likes to hold his wines for a long time before release – this 2002 is in fact the current release of his vintage wine. There are 2004s, 2006s and 2008s resting in the cellar, but it will be some time before they're deemed ready to sell.

With over nine years on the lees, you can really see what time in the bottle does. A captivating, kaleidoscopic nose of yeasts and doughs and roasted nuts, incredible richness on the palate, and a powerful yet elegant finish make this one of my favorite vintage bubbly in recent memory. We need to thank Vincent for ageing it at the winery for us, as it is now at its peak of deliciousness. Enjoy every drop, for alas there is no more to be had...



*In the vines with Vincent Couche*

## **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 Scott Paul Champagne Club shipment coming in the fall, and of course for arrival and release information on all the yummy Bubbly headed our way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website:

**[www.scottpaul.com](http://www.scottpaul.com)**

**Attention Burgundy Fans and Oregon Pinot Fans!** *If you have not done so already, check out our **Burgundy Club** and our new **Scott Paul Club**. Contact Kelly Karr at 503-319-5827 or [kellykarr@scottpaul.com](mailto:kellykarr@scottpaul.com) for more info.*