

WINE News

*The gift of Champagne,
and one for you!*



OCTOBER 10, 2016 FEATURES

- 2 Tasting Vin Clair; Perennial Laurent-Perrier
- 3 The Clos: Saints, Monks, War, Walls and the Noose
- 4 Distinctive Verzenay: Champagne Michel Arnould

From the Vineyards of Champagne

By Gary Westby

It is an overused phrase to say that wine is born in the vineyard, but it is worth repeating when talking about Champagne. Because Champagne is the most elegant of wines, and so synonymous with luxury, it is easy to forget that it is born from dirt, plants and sunshine. The places where all three of these elements come together ideally are the places where the best Champagne is made. In this newsletter we will explore the most famous sites of all Champagne, the rare “clos” vineyards, with Scott Beckerley. We will also explore the estate of one of our best Grand Cru growers, Champagne Michel Arnould. Diana Turk

will take a look at Champagne before the bubbles and Alex Schroeder will explore the classic Champagne of Laurent-Perrier.

Here at K&L we have never been in a better position to take care of your Champagne needs for the holidays. Our selection has never been wider, and our Direct Import program has never featured as many values. The dollar is strong against the euro, and Champagne has had many good harvests running now. As I type, they are harvesting the 2016s, which seem to have been saved by good September weather. A toast to you all!

Cristal is the Champagne most synonymous with glamour and luxury, but has substance far beyond the glitz of the wine’s popular image. It is an all-estate product, and the new **2009 Louis Roederer “Cristal” Brut Champagne (\$199.00)** is the first to come exclusively from vineyards that they farm organically. It is a precocious young Cristal and already shows the creamy, laid-back elegance that makes this subtle wine so sought-after. 96 points VN.



The **Charles Ellner “Carte d’Or” Brut Champagne (\$34.99)** deserves the 90 point rating that it was awarded by *Wine Spectator*. This rich, toasty, brioche-laden bottle has classy, pinpoint bubbles and flavors that one can only get from a long-aged bottle. It is composed of 75% Chardonnay and 25% Pinot Noir from the Ellner estate, all within the borders of Epernay. With over five years of aging on the lees, it has earned its toast through patience!



The latest incarnation of the **Laurent-Perrier “Grand Siècle” Brut Champagne (\$109.99)** is one of their best efforts in the last decade. A blend of 1997, 1999 and 2002, it shows an initial nose that is rich with buttery notes, pastry dough and tangy citrus. On the palate, a superfine bead with lemon cream, yellow apples and a fine, brisk finish with hints of lime. A pretty, perfect gift for *any* lover of Champagne. 97 points WE, 95 points RP, 93 points WS.



Cover: Krug’s Clos du Mesnil, the most famous vineyard in all of Champagne.

Tasting Vin Clair—Thanks to Master of Disguise, Ariston

By Diana Turk

Tasting vin clair outside Champagne proper is tricky, and as a result, few of us on the staff had tried anything pre-secondary fermentation. Enter master of disguise Paul-Vincent Ariston. Bollinger may claim James Bond, but the true spy in Champagne proved to be the winemaker of Aspasia. He devised a system of using half of an actual cork, complete with cage and foil. Ariston so cleverly concealed the bottle cap closure that a few of the 375-milliliter bottles he shipped may have briefly ended up on our shelves for sale!

In still form, the young wines are, as you might expect, screaming with acid. This is cold-climate fruit from northern latitudes on par with Fargo, North Dakota, and those tertiary notes so coveted in the final product were not always perceptible at first sip. But vin clairs present a snapshot of terroir and vintage clearly, and by tasting them next to their finished counterparts, we were able to understand how time and deft winemaking can influence the final, sparkling result.

Ariston Aspasia “Carte Blanche” Brut Champagne (\$27.99)

Based on the 2009 harvest, Carte Blanche spends five years on the lees, and has the biscuity notes to prove it. Ariston is committed to making a high-quality entry-level wine, and there’s no doubt he’s accomplished that here. A traditional cépage of 40% Chardonnay and 30% each of Pinot Noir and Meunier, the Carte Blanche shows apple and crunchy pear fruit, tempered by underlying chalky notes and a toasty finish. The vin clair, composed of 70% fruit from the riper 2015 vintage (plus reserves), was bright with minerality but already

presenting a more mellow acidity than other vin clairs. I could easily see how it could develop into a moussy Champagne upon release.

Ariston Aspasia Brut Rosé Champagne (\$34.99)

The most dramatic transformation from vin clair to sparkler was the electric rosé. Composed of 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Meunier, this expensively made wine goes through carbonic maceration and the saignée method, with a little still red wine added in. The result is stunning: gorgeous wild strawberry fruit with delicate bead, bracing acidity and a clean, mineral finish.

Ariston Aspasia “Cépages d’Antan” Brut Champagne (\$99.00)

Wow. Mostly from the 2010 vintage (you can tell by inspecting what’s printed on the cork), this is a field blend of indigenous varieties Arbanne and Meslier, plus Pinot Blanc, and is drinking beautifully in both in its still and sparkling forms. The vin clair showed neroli oil on the nose, more aromatic and complex than just citrus, and felt the lowest acid of the tasting, thanks in part to later-ripening Pinot Blanc. But that orange blossom really came alive after aging, bursting with honeysuckle, white floral, tart lemon, beeswax and wild honey, plus biscuit notes from a long aging on the lees. The acid is still bright, but what really sets it apart is a slight earthy funk, with interesting rusticity and depth in addition to elegance. Cépages d’Antan is a must-try for oenophiles, but even casual Champagne fans will enjoy this as a versatile food pairing.

Laurent-Perrier: A Perennial Palate Pleaser

By Alex Schroeder

Laurent-Perrier is a perennial favorite among staff and customers at K&L, due in large part to its continued commitment to quality and consistency in the world of Champagne. The late Bernard de Nonancourt can be credited for shaping the company into the form we know today. He took the helm in 1949 after serving in WWII, during which he led a French task force into Hitler’s wine cave to retrieve thousands of stolen wines. He introduced stainless steel to the region, created the ever-popular Grand Siècle Cuvée with Charles de Gaulle, and popularized the iconic Cuvée Rosé. Today, his legacy lives on as these wines continue to awe critics and consumers alike, making Laurent-Perrier a household name synonymous with quality.

Laurent-Perrier “Grand Siècle” Brut Champagne (\$109.99) is their prestige cuvée. Literally “Great Century,” it’s named after the age of King Louis XIV, and represents the awe and splendor that was known under his reign, during which Versailles was built. It’s composed entirely from Grand Cru sites, blended from three great vintages, then aged on its lees for the entirety of a decade. A blend of 55% Chardonnay and 45% Pinot Noir, the fruit is rich and pronounced, and balances out the delicious, toasty yeast character wonderfully, with an acidic edge that adds electricity to the glass—true craftsmanship.

Everything about the **Cuvée Rosé (\$69.99)** is rich and seductive—the deep pink hue, the lush Pinot Noir fruit flavors, the silky texture. The fruit, entirely Grand Cru Pinot Noir, is destemmed, crushed and left in contact with the skins for an unusually long 72 hours, before being vinified and aged on the lees for four years. The result is a wine rich in the pure flavors of ripe strawberries, raspberries, black cherries and hazelnuts, with a creamy texture, crisp bubbles, and incredible length. This is a very delicious—and unique—rosé Champagne.

Laurent-Perrier’s top selling wine is their non-vintage **Brut Champagne (\$34.99)**, and for good reason: it over-delivers quality for the money. A blend of 50% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir and 15% Pinot Meunier, it’s made in a reductive style that minimizes contact with oxygen, so the fruit tastes young and fresh, while four years aging on the lees provides a subtle, nutty contrast. Overall, a very lively and deliciously balanced bottle of bubbles you don’t have to wait for a special occasion to enjoy. Cheers!





Saints, Monks, War, Walls and the Noose

By Scott Beckerley

On Monday, September 12, I had the rare opportunity to taste the wines of “the Clos.” The “Clos” being the Clos du Mont, Clos de Goisses, Clos Saint-Hilaire and, of course, Clos du Mesnil. All of these vineyards have their own unique histories and represent the best-of-the-best walled vineyards in all of Champagne. Some of this history is sacred and some of it is profane.

We started the evening off with a bang with the **2002 Krug “Clos du Mesnil” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne (\$899.99)**. I know, I know—the things we do here for our customers! But *someone* has to do it. This walled-in parcel of land in Mesnil-sur-Oger is a very small 1.85 acres in the heart of the village. The original wall was built in 1698, the same year the vineyard was planted. These small walled-in vineyards tend to have their own mesoclimate, which offers protection from frost and also warms it slightly from the reflection of the sun and the heat-trapping abilities of the wall itself. This wine had a wonderful nose of lemon meringue, toasted nuts and freshly whipped cream. On the palate, it is extremely unique with lemony zest, mandarin orange, kiwi and a little nutmeg. The finish is super, super clean with lime fruit and chalky notes. Two hours later, it was all about toasted nuts and citrus! So, very, very Krug. 98 points WS, 96 points VN.



Next up, and a complete change of pace, was the **Fallet-Dart “Clos du Mont” Brut Champagne (\$79.99)**, an interesting blend of the 1999 and 2002 vintages with 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir. The Clos du Mont vineyard is also walled in. It is in the village of Drachy and has been planted for over 1,000 years! It was once tended by monks and the original wall was destroyed in WWI. The wine had a very big nose of caramel, maple leaf and sweet oak. Rich and balanced, with stone fruits and yellow apples. It retained a nice, clean finish with some toastiness. Kudos to Fallet-Dart to following up well after the Krug Mesnil. A very hard act to follow!

After the Fallet-Dart, we tried the very famous **2006 Philipponnat “Clos de Goisses” Brut Champagne (\$159.99)**. This particular parcel, in Mareuil-sur-Ay, only has a wall at the very bottom and is, in actuality, a precariously steep hill located on a giant lump of chalk—the name comes from “angoisse,” which means “terror” or “anxiety.” Long ago, criminals were routinely hung at the very top of the vineyard, probably not to enjoy the view. American troops liberated the area in 1944 during WWII. It is also two degrees centigrade warmer than neighboring vineyards, due to the south-facing, 40-degree grade. Regarded as the top “Clos” in Champagne by many, it has been owned by Philipponnat since 1935, and was planted to mostly Pinot Noir in the 1950s. To this point in the tasting, this was the richest of the selections, with pastry dough, baked apple and ginger scents. Somewhat brighter on the palate, with dark, yellow fruits, caramel, and baking spices. Super solid. 96 points VN, 93 points WS.



My journey came to what could have been a sad end—because it was all over—with the **1999 Billecart-Salmon “Le Clos St-Hilaire” Brut Blanc de Noirs Champagne (\$399.00)**. Not so sad to end on this note! Amazing, amazing bead that goes on forever; dark and golden hued; fine and frothy, with elements of smoke, exotic spice and anise. Once it opened up, it becomes even more intriguing with more spices, praline, truffle and toast. It finishes softly and elegantly and is 100% Pinot Noir. I have actually been to the Clos Saint-Hilaire vineyard, as opposed to merely seeing the others from a car. It is also located, like Clos de Goisses, in Mareuil-sur-Ay. It is a one-hectare property planted in 1964 and composed of clay and limestone. This is very porous and makes for great drainage. It is named after the patron saint of Mareuil-sur-Ay, and this bottling is indeed heavenly! Depending upon the vintage, 3,500 to 7,000 bottles of St-Hilaire are produced. 96 points VN.

The Distinctive Verzenay Wines of Champagne Michel Arnould

By Gary Westby

We have been advocates for small, estate-grown Champagne for two decades here at K&L, and I am a huge believer that wine produced on a human scale tastes better. When the owner of the property works the vines, makes the wines and drives the forklift, it takes the Champagne to another level of quality. Patrick Arnould is one of the best examples of this type of vigneron.

His house, Champagne Michel Arnould, is our top Direct Import producer of dry, powerful Pinot-based Champagnes. Located on the Mountain of Reims, Verzenay is one of the most exciting and unique terroirs in all of Champagne. The furthest north of all the Grand Crus, it



In Verzenay, it's another day of the romance of making Champagne for vigneron Patrick Arnould.

faces north, away from the sun, and still manages to produce some of the most powerful Pinot Noir in the region. Some of the locals say that a mysterious warm air current is the explanation for this ripening anomaly; others will say that it is impossible to

explain, like the flight of the bumblebee. I love the distinct, hazelnut quality that this special village stamps on its wines, and I feel very lucky to have convinced Mr. Patrick Arnould to sell us some of his great wines.

Patrick is the fifth generation of Champagne Michel Arnould. They own 27 acres in the village of Verzenay, a quite sizable holding in this high-rent area. It is planted to 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Chardonnay, which reflects the average plantation for the village. The black Pinot is king here. They have a high proportion of old vines (40 to 50 years old) and all of the wines undergo complete malolactic fermentation in stainless steel and enamel vats, except the B50, which is done in barrel. The values here are incredible, as we have bypassed all the import company and distributor markups.

Michel Arnould Verzenay Brut Reserve Champagne (750ml \$32.99; 1.5L \$69.99) This is a blend of 75% Pinot Noir and 25% Chardonnay, entirely from estate vineyards in the Grand Cru of Verzenay. This is a great party Champagne, since it is full of flavor yet refreshing and *moreish*. The hazelnut Pinot character so unique to the village of Verzenay is pronounced in this wine, and many good tasters have mistaken it for barrel fermented (it is actually all stainless and enamel fermented) when presented the wine blind. The texture is full and the bead is refined—a Champagne that you will be proud to serve to your guests, or perhaps not too proud to save for yourself!

Michel Arnould Verzenay Brut Rosé Champagne (750ml \$34.99; 1.5L \$74.99) 100% Pinot Noir Grand Cru, acquired by assembling different vintages and red Coteaux Champenoise coming from old vines. This lovely rosé Champagne offers hints of raspberry, strawberry and red currant. It is very refined on the palate where more berries, and finally grenadine notes, emerge from this very well-balanced rosé.

Michel Arnould “Grand Cuvée” Brut Champagne (\$39.99) This is Patrick's pride and joy, and is based exclusively on the 2009 harvest with a generous six years aging on the lees. It is composed of two-thirds Pinot Noir from old vines on the estate and one-third Chardonnay he trades to get from a close friend in the famous village of Mesnil. This has incredible, black fruit Pinot power, hazelnut complexity and an honest brioche character from long aging. The Mesnil Chardonnay comes through beautifully on the back end, giving the wine a chalky lift that wines from this area sometimes lack.

2007 Michel Arnould “Cuvée B50” Brut Champagne (\$99.00) This ambitious all barrel-fermented Champagne is only available in tiny quantities—we received less than 10 cases and we are his US importer! If you are looking for a powerful, ultra-rare bottle, you have found it! Look for vanilla and hazelnut as well as brioche on the nose, and incisive, dry minerality on the back end.



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