

THE VITALS

LE PAN takes the pulse of the world's premier region for sparkling wine.

While grower Champagnes have become the 'in' thing in recent years and sales of rosé fizz have enjoyed a concurrent boom, the prestige cuvée and vintage categories have outpaced all others. Perhaps that's because, in the context of collectable fine wine, these are bargains. Yes, they are inevitably more expensive than non-vintage Champagnes, but, paradoxically, they can often prove better value: they represent the absolute summit of quality at a price often only modestly higher.

Consider the price of the finest Burgundy or Bordeaux's first growths, and a bottle of Krug or Cristal seems a steal. For less than US\$250, you can procure some of the best the region has to offer. You might argue that high yields and the economies of scale of a big house keep prices low, yet the prestige cuvées of many of the top growers are generally made in smaller volumes, often from lower yields, and are almost universally cheaper than those of larger houses. What's more, the production of prestige cuvées is complex and lengthy – no Burgundy nor Bordeaux producer releases its wines 10 or 15 years after the vintage.

Consider, too, the context. Rising grape prices are adding to the cost of making Champagne every year, as the houses try to secure enough fruit to supply a market that is rebounding after the global financial crisis. There is a finite supply of quality fruit and few opportunities for Champagne houses to bag a prime piece of vineyard land when the appellation is at its maximum limit. On the odd occasion that a vineyard is put on the market, you can be sure of a bidding war, despite record highs of close to US\$2 million per hectare (about US\$800,000 per acre) for grand cru land on the Côte des Blancs. Any sane investor would consider the decades it takes to make a return on investment laughable and retreat hastily back to their stocks.

For those grape-growers sitting pretty on a piece of prime vineyard, selling up and retiring to the French Riviera makes for an attractive option. But an increasing number are instead choosing to make their own wines, and some are highly coveted. The finest grower Champagne producers, including Selosse, Agrapart and Vilmart, now add the flesh to the spine of any Champagne collector's cellar.

TALKING POINT CRU OR CRUDE?

In Champagne, all the vineyards lying within the boundaries of a village designated 'grand cru' or 'premier cru' receive the same rating. Is this crude village-by-village system accurate? You'd be amazed at the houses that ignore it. Billecart-Salmon's single-hectare Clos Saint-Hilaire produces one of Champagne's finest blanc de noirs from the premier cru village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ. "So what if it isn't grand cru?" says Antoine Roland-Billecart. "Sometimes it's better to have old vines in a premier cru."

In the neighboring village of Aÿ Bollinger agrees, with its glorious flagship La Grande Année containing a portion of premier cru fruit, while Krug makes its own vintage-by-vintage classification through blind tasting, rather than by site.

If Champagne were to give due respect to its growers and its finest houses, and seriously look at its existing territory, it would radically revise its crude village-by-village cru system and assess each and every vineyard in its own right.



It is the least understood of the region's three main grape varieties, but there is more **Pinot Meunier** (left) in Champagne than Chardonnay. Budding later and ripening earlier than Pinot Noir, it is widely planted in the

cooler parts of the Marne Valley. It is commonly said to bring fruitiness to a blend – to become better acquainted with its characteristics, try the handful of varietal Pinot Meuniers from Chartogne-Taillet, Egly-Ouriet and Laherte Frères.

THE PRICE OF PRESTIGE

How some of the best vintages are priced, across some of the biggest houses:

2002

Bollinger Vieilles Vignes Françaises	\$849
Krug	No vintage declared
Krug Clos du Mesnil	No vintage declared
Louis Roederer Cristal	\$268
Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon	\$176
Salon Le Mesnil	\$149
Taittinger Comtes de Champagne	\$186

1996

Bollinger Vieilles Vignes Françaises	\$1,182
Krug	\$418
Krug Clos du Mesnil	\$1,534
Louis Roederer Cristal	\$407
Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon	\$286
Salon Le Mesnil	\$510
Taittinger Comtes de Champagne	\$297

1990

Bollinger Vieilles Vignes Françaises	\$1,846
Krug	\$427
Krug Clos du Mesnil	\$1,438
Louis Roederer Cristal	\$628
Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon	\$334
Salon Le Mesnil	\$775
Taittinger Comtes de Champagne	\$382

1985

Bollinger Vieilles Vignes Françaises	\$1,093
Krug	\$559
Krug Clos du Mesnil	\$1,510
Louis Roederer Cristal	\$559
Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon	\$361
Salon Le Mesnil	\$940
Taittinger Comtes de Champagne	\$408

Source: Wine-Searcher. Global average prices in US\$, excluding local sales tax

« 12 X 12 »

THE 12 BEST VINTAGES OF THE 12 BEST CUVÉES

Moët & Chandon
Dom Pérignon 1969

Salon Le Mesnil
Blanc de Blancs 1988

Diebolt-Vallois
Blanc de Blancs 1976

Pol Roger Sir Winston
Churchill 1990

Philipponnat Clos des
Goisses 1976

Bollinger Vieilles Vignes
Françaises Blanc de Noirs
1990

Krug Clos du Mesnil
Blanc de Blancs 1979

Jacques Selosse
Extra Brut 1996

Taittinger
Comtes de Champagne
Blanc de Blancs 1982

Perrier-Jouët
Belle Epoque 2002

Louis Roederer
Cristal 1985

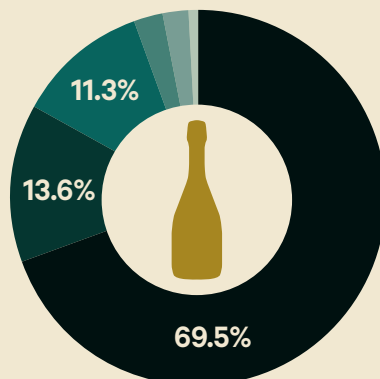
Dom Ruinart Blanc de
Blancs 2004



WHAT WE'RE DRINKING

69.5%	Brut non-vintage
13.6%	Prestige cuvée
11.3%	Rosé
2.6%	Demi-sec
2.1%	Vintage
0.9%	Others

Exports by value



Source: Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne

WHERE WE'RE DRINKING IT

52.8%
In France



25.4%
Rest of Europe



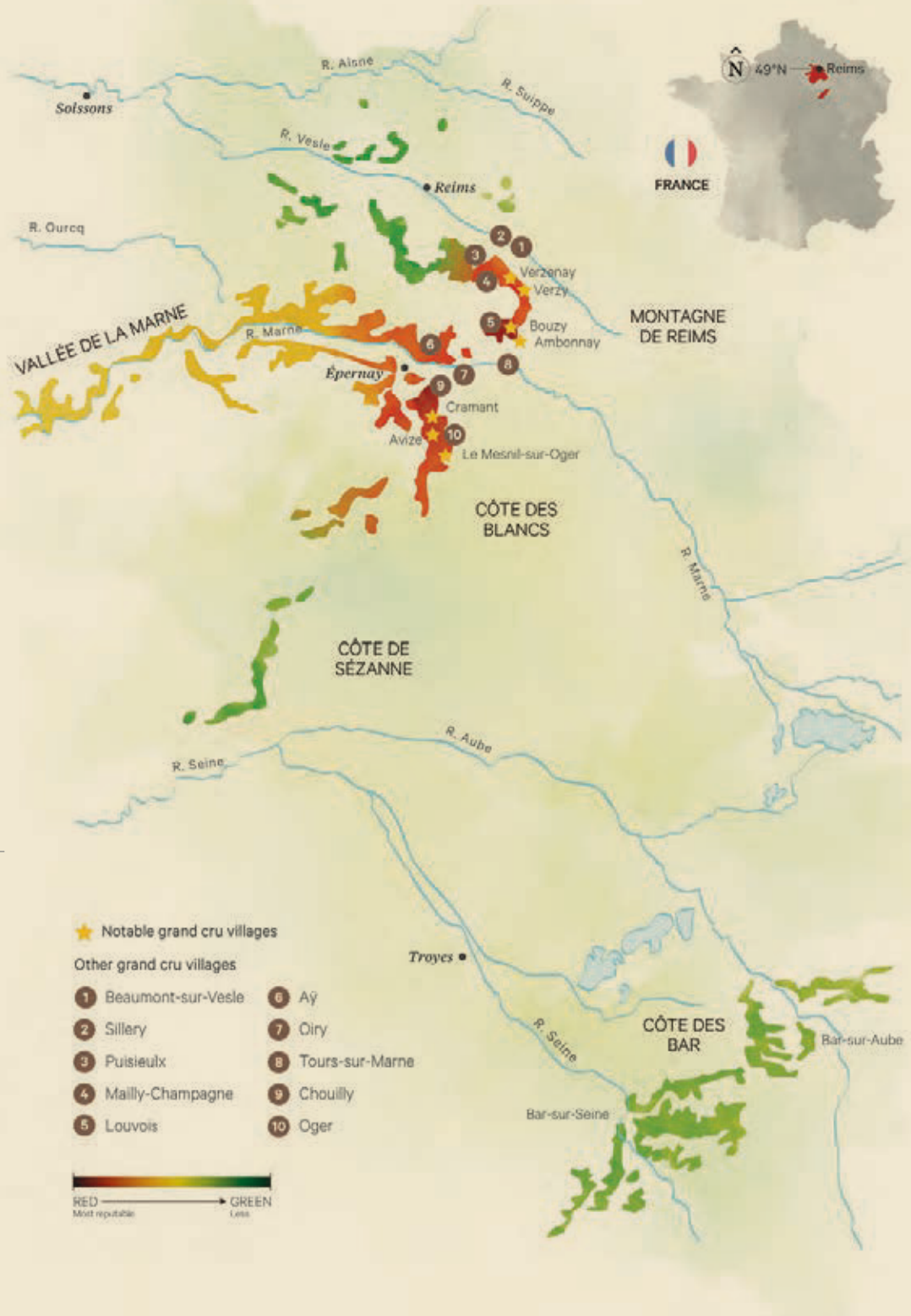
21.8%
Outside Europe



Global shipments by volume

CHAMPAGNE: A GUIDE

The Champagne region is moderate in size, but covers a wide area. More than 277,000 individual parcels are spread among 320 villages in four distinct sub-regions, for a total of almost 34,000 hectares (84,000 acres) – slightly more than Burgundy, but only a quarter the size of Bordeaux. Seven permitted grape varieties are grown, including Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay. Each sub-region has its own specialty and character, although these differences are erased by the fact that the vast majority of Champagne is still a pan-regional blend. However, more and more producers are breaking with tradition to focus on single-village, or even single-vineyard, Champagnes – the so-called *Champagnes de terroir*.



Montagne de Reims

This verdant hill south of Reims is home to many storied producers. Capped with a forest bristling with wild boar, this is one of the traditional homes of Pinot Noir, producing powerful, structured, long-lived wines. The south- and east-facing slopes in villages such as Ambonnay and Bouzy produce ripe, lush wines of a very sensual nature. The wines that draw on Pinot Noir fruit from these villages read like a who's who of Champagne. The north-facing slopes incorporating the villages of Verzenay and Verzy bring tension and nerve to a blend.

Vallée de la Marne

Pinot Meunier has found its home in the Marne Valley, where the cooler, more frost-prone conditions often hamper Chardonnay and Pinot Noir maturation. Look out for a Blanc de Meunier from Cerseuil-based Jérôme Dehours. In the warmer, south-facing sites closer to Épernay, Pinot Noir can be grown successfully. The villages of Aÿ and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ are the Valley's finest terroirs.

Côte des Blancs

A rolling crest of chalk-white hills where the lime-rich soils are a perfect medium for Chardonnay. Boasting six grands crus, including Avize, Cramant, Le Mesnil (home to Salon, Delamotte and Krug's famous Clos du Mesnil), the region is not limited just to famous sites. It produces wonderful fruit in the Côte de Sézanne and around the towns of Montgueux and Vitry-le-François.

Côte des Bar

Far to the south-east of Champagne lies the Côte des Bar, in the Aube department, representing nearly a quarter of all plantings. The quality in the once-derided Aube has never been higher and its houses, from the mid-sized Drappier to tiny artisanal producers such as Cédric Bouchard, Marie Courtin and Vouette et Sorbée, are producing some of the most innovative wines of the region.

CONTROVERSY: Cleaning Up Its Appellation

Until relatively recently, the terroir of Champagne was more associated with the remnants of a Parisian's shopping bag than the nuances of its chalky limestone soil. For decades, growers used urban compost from Paris and other cities to enrich the soil, but the increasing quantities of non-biodegradable material led to the startlingly odd sight of plastic bags strewn throughout the vineyards. Worse still, the compost also contained cadmium, lead and other toxic metals. It was not until 1995 that the use of this type of compost was forbidden, with a raft of environmental initiatives having since been enacted: chemical vineyard spraying has halved in the past decade and plastic bags are a thing of the past.

There remains, though, much to be done. While most sprays today are organically approved, the copper derivatives commonly used are still toxic. Liberal use can lead to dangerous levels in some producers' vineyards,

and the practice of employing chemical weedkillers is still all too common. The result can be stark. Tim Hall, United Kingdom agent for a number of smaller Champagne producers, notes: "Sometimes you sigh with despair when you drive through the vineyards and see huge tracts of land which resemble a bare, grey-brown, scorched-earth moonscape, denuded by herbicide and rutted, hard soil compacted by heavy tractors."

There are signs of progress though. Champagne Fleury first championed biodynamic production in the region in the early 1990s. Today, Louis Roederer farms 65 hectares (160 acres) biodynamically, while other producers such as Champagne Drappier are striving to be as sustainable as possible. Terroir might not be the most important element of the make-up of most Champagnes, but that doesn't mean it should be a blot on the landscape.



The region has embraced environmental initiatives

PHOTO: ALAIN JULIEN/STRINGER

TOP VINTAGES

- 1976 High alcohol, low acidity
- 1979 Structured, complex and very attractive
- 1982 Tremendous quality
- 1985 Generous, balanced acidity, high quality
- 1988 Firm acidity, expressive, long-lived
- 1989 Rich, early-drinking
- 1990 Opulent, some on decline
- 1995 Ripe and concentrated
- 1996 Thrilling, brilliant acidity
- 1998 Fine, lighter style
- 2000 Good ripeness and balance
- 2002 High quality, age-worthy
- 2003 Heavy
- 2004 Extraordinary
- 2005 Elegant, balanced
- 2006 Variable results, some great
- 2008 Good concentration, lots of finesse
- 2009 Very ripe

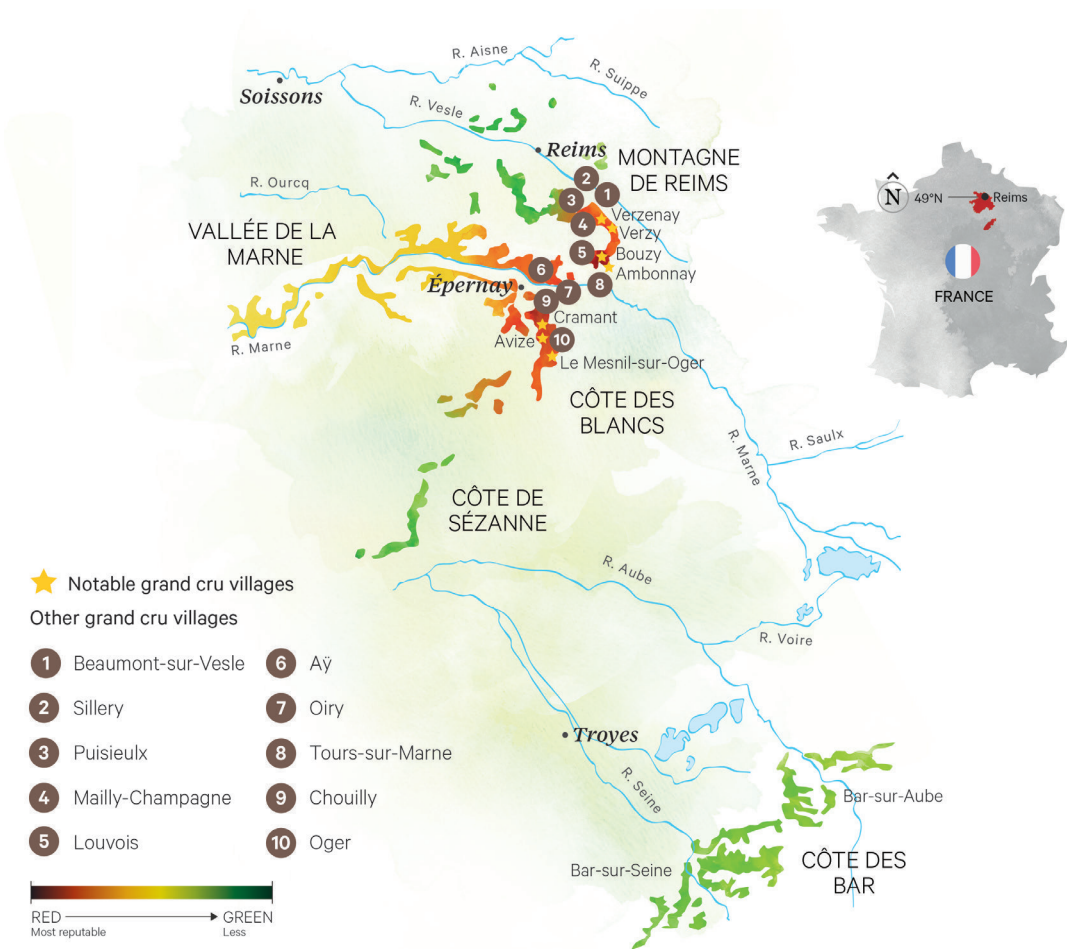


IN THEIR PRIME

- G.H. Mumm 1979
- Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs 1986
- Jacquesson Grand Vin Signature Dégorgement Tardif 1990
- Bollinger La Grande Année 1995
- Drappier Grande Sendrée 1999

CHAMPAGNE

Champagne is the essence of luxury and the essential element of celebration. It is, though, one of France's coldest wine regions. Winemaking in this northerly spot is a triumph of ingenuity over nature, with chefs de caves blending wines from myriad sources across the region to produce such mythic cuvées as Dom Pérignon, Cristal and Dom Ruinart. The results are stunning: the best wines are the ultimate in collectibility, with ageability, rarity and style coming together in a heady mix.



The ancient towns of Reims and Épernay lie at the heart of Champagne, surrounded by sub-regions that bring different qualities to the final blends. Just south of Reims lies the Montagne de Reims, famed for its Pinot Noir. Among the most renowned villages here are Ambonnay and Bouzy to the south; Verzy and Verzenay sit to the north. The wines are substantial and eminently ageable, with notes of fresh flowers and marzipan. A chain of chalky hills south of Épernay goes by the name Côte des Blancs on account of the Chardonnay that dominates its

vineyards. Six grand cru villages produce racy, perfumed wines framed by citrus fruit and a prominent mineral streak.

The Marne river traces a thin blue ribbon as it flows between the Côte des Blancs and the Montagne. This is the kingdom of the Pinot Meunier grape, producing wines with a floral perfume and an easy, soft structure.

Finally, far to the south in Aube lies the Côte des Bar. Although part of Champagne, it is much closer to Burgundy than to Reims. Pinot Noir is the specialty here, and the wines are powerful and sometimes slightly rustic.

OUR REVIEWER



Charles Curtis MW

Senior wine editor Charles Curtis covers Champagne and sparkling wine, Rhône and Southern France for LE PAN. A New York resident, he runs his own fine- and rare-wine consultancy. He has been the head of wine for Christie's in Asia and the Americas, and has worked extensively as a wine writer, consultant and judge.

How the wines were tasted

The Champagnes rated and reviewed in the following pages were tasted under a variety of circumstances on at least three continents. Many were tasted in Champagne either at the houses themselves, or elsewhere in the region during the intense Champagne Week in April, when small producers organize independent salons featuring wines from 10 to 20 houses. Others were tasted in New York, Paris and Hong Kong with their importers, and the happiest portion were enjoyed with meals of every description, as befits this food wine par excellence.

STAR BOTTLES

Exceptional Champagnes featured in this issue of the LP GUIDE and among our extensive notes online at lepanmedia.com

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- 96 Ayala Cuvée Perle d'Ayala Brut 2005
 - 95 Dom Ruinart Rosé Brut 1988
 - 95 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004
 - 94 Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004
 - 94 Demièrre-Ansiot Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006
 - 94 Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004
 - 94 Krug Rosé Brut NV
 - 94 Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon Brut 2004
 - 94 Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004
 - 94 Pol Roger Extra Cuvée de Reserve Rosé Brut 2004
 - 94 Veuve Clicquot Rosé Brut 2004

CHAMPAGNE 2009

The first releases of smaller producers from this young vintage

Agrapart & Fils Avizoise Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2009

92

This Champagne shows vast potential. Although it is slightly backwards and reduced at this point, it almost drips with mineral, lime peel and smoky aromas. A superb expression of Avize. —

Agrapart & Fils Minéral Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2009

91

Showing bright lemony fruit with just a hint of passion fruit accented by notes of smoke, toast and limey chalk, this is a mineral wine indeed. The texture is fine and elegant, yet it expresses well the richness of the 2009 vintage in spite of the fact that it lacks the added sugar of the dosage. —

Agrapart & Fils Venus Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2009

93

A superb grower tête de cuvée, the Venus bottling has a compellingly sweet/tart lemon cream aroma with hints of mineral and brioche and a creamy, rich, dense texture that is supple and silky yet profoundly deep. —

Cédric Bouchard Roses de Jeanne La Bolorée Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009

92

Elegant and fine with a floral twist to the nose, this is rich but not heavy, with balanced acidity and a very pleasant texture. It is produced from a small vineyard of old vine Pinot Blanc in the Aube by one of the top young growers to watch. 🍷

David Léclapart L'Apôtre Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2009

90

This is the most convincing of all the Champagnes produced by David Léclapart. Made from 100% cask-fermented old vine Chardonnay from Trépail, it has a richly truffly aroma and a dense, creamy texture that leads to a lovely lingering finish. 🍷

Emmanuel Brochet Les Hauts Chardonnay Extra Brut 2009

93

Superb Champagne, with a rich green apple and crème fraîche nose and a dense, luxurious texture. This is a sexy and seductive style, produced from old vine fruit grown on limey soils. Wonderful. —

Francis Boulard Les Rachais Brut Nature 2009

92

Crisp, fresh Champagne with a penetrating lemon peel and mineral note on the nose and a lovely tension on the palate. An expressive, elegant fizz with verve but also real concentration. 🍷

Franck Pascal Harmonie Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2009

90

This blanc de noirs style of Champagne has a surprisingly mineral note on the nose and then a classic combination of red fruit and floral character, reflecting the 50:50 split between Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Crisp and elegant on the palate, it has moderate length and a balanced finish. 🍷

J.L. Vergnon Confiance Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2009

92

This engaging Champagne from Le Mesnil has a pronounced aroma of green apple and spice with a firm mineral edge. The wine is fermented in cask and bottled without filtration, giving it a soft, tender texture. Lovely! 🍷

Laherte Frères Les Empreintes Brut Nature 2009

92

Lovely, expressive aromas of coconut and exotic fruit rush from the glass of this exemplary biodynamic Champagne. Fresh and lively yet complete and round, this 50:50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir is fermented in cask on natural yeasts and dosed at 4 grams per liter. Marvelous. —

Lancelot-Pienne Cuvée Marie Lancelot Cramant Grand Cru Brut 2009

92

Very pleasant notes of lemon peel and toast open this wine, which goes on to show impressive density and charming finesse. Lightly dosed, it is a marvelous expression of the terroir of grand cru Cramant. 🍷



Wines are listed in alphabetical order

**Marie Courtin Efflorescence
Extra Brut 2009**

Intensely concentrated and tightly wound, this is 100% Pinot Noir. It is fermented in cask and released without any dosage. With a prominent yeasty character and hints of flowers and toasted almond, it is a delicious wine that should develop quite well with time in the bottle. —

91

**Pierre Paillard Les Mailletterettes Acte 1
Bouzy Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut 2009**

A blanc de noirs Champagne – 100% Pinot Noir – that has kept its feminine side, with notes of fresh flowers, ripe pear and toast. The texture is softly elegant, but in no way lacking structure, due to the low dosage and the concentration of the fruit, which lead to a lingering finish. Marvelous. 🍷

91

**Marie-Noelle Ledru Cuvée du Goulté
Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut 2009**

With lovely intensity and a great depth of flavor, this is a marvelous wine. Expect ripe apricot fruit, hints of toasted brioche and a suggestion of hazelnut continuing into a creamy mousse, with balanced acidity and a long finish. Bravo. 🍷

93

**Pierre Paillard Les Mottellettes Acte 1
Bouzy Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009**

Citrus and chalk, mineral and verve – a classic blanc de blancs, except that this one is from the heart of the Montagne de Reims. There is a wonderful concentration and intensity here along with balance that manifests itself in a line and length that is truly admirable. A wine worth seeking out. 🍷

90

CHAMPAGNE 2008

Bigger name releases with more bottle age are starting to emerge

**A. Margaine Premier Cru
Blanc de Blancs Brut 2008**

A rich style of Chardonnay that almost resembles the Pinot Noir grown elsewhere here, via floral, nutty aromas and a richness and density on the palate that belies its origin. A lush, lovely wine. 🍷

91

Gatinois Aÿ Grand Cru Brut 2008

From the grand cru village of Aÿ, this is concentrated and powerful, with notes of ripe pear, marzipan, fresh flowers and toast. Made from 100% Pinot Noir, the texture is wine-like and solid, with a firmly mineral underpinning, but this never loses sight of elegance and finesse. A truly marvelous Champagne. —

92

Chartogne-Taillet Brut 2008

Pinot Noir dominates here, giving the wine a floral note to complement the crisp citrus fruit and the mineral and almond notes. From a single vineyard called Les Couarres, this shows a fresh, lively character that pairs well with the tender, supple fruit expression. 🍷

91

**Hébrart Rive Gauche Rive Droite
Grand Cru Extra Brut 2008**

Intense aromas of passion fruit, guava and pomelo highlight this wine, with spice and toast notes developing with a bit of time. Balanced acidity and a rich mouthfeel lead to a rich, lingering finish. Fermented in cask and lightly dosed, this is surprisingly delicious. 🍷

91

**Emmanuel Brochet Les Hauts Meuniers
Extra Brut 2008**

Exotic notes of pomelo and tangerine mingle with fresh floral notes for an enchanting whole, while the structured yet silky and expressive texture, supported by fresh acidity, leads to a lingering, subtle finish. 🍷

92

**J.L. Vergnon Expression
Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2008**

Pure, citrusy and clean, this lightly dosed wine from Oger has an undercurrent of mineral and toast aromas. There is a great delicacy of expression here, yet the lively acidity gives the wine impressive power as well. 🍷

91

**Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs
Brut 2008**

Lemony and fine, this shows a marvelous creamy autolysis character and a nice intensity and depth of flavor. Crisp yet creamy on the palate this blanc de blancs has wonderful balance and length. 🍷

92

Louis Roederer Brut 2008

Creamy notes of ripe apple, toasted brioche, mineral and smoke combine to provide a compelling aromatic palate to this young wine. Fresh yet satisfyingly substantial, this drinks well now but will only improve over the next decade. —

92

Nicolas Maillart Les Francs de Pied Premier Cru Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2008

Interesting and delicious, this 100% Pinot Noir is produced from ungrafted vines. Winemaking is done in cask, and wines are very lightly dosed, which combines to produce a gentle floral nose with red fruit and earth, a moderately vigorous mousse and good tension and length on the palate. †

91

Marguet Père & Fils Ambonnay Grand Cru Les Crayères 2008

An impressive wine with a lovely concentration and depth of flavor, it features toasted brioche and a wonderful melange of roast walnut, ripe pear, smoke and mineral aromas. With 18 months on the cork after disgorging, it is starting to open up now and showing a rich, lingering finish. A wine to seek out. †

93

Philipponnat Blanc de Noirs Brut 2008

Boasting notes of marzipan, hawthorn, ripe pear and a hint of plum, this is the wine formerly called the Réserve Millésime. Now 100% Pinot Noir, with five years on the lees it has picked up weight and power. A structured, powerful wine, it is half fermented in cask, half in tank to give it flesh and depth. Well done. †

92

Marie-Noelle Ledru Cuvée du Goulé Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut 2008

Structured and a bit strict on the attack, with time this powerful Champagne reveals lots of floral and marzipan notes and very vinous Pinot Noir fruit. Powerful and dense, this should be marvelous with a few more years of age. †

93

Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2008

Almost already quaffable in its charm, the fruit here is less forward than the 2004, but the beginning of expressive notes of citrus and linden and just a hint of smoke and mineral are starting to emerge nicely. The texture is firmly structured and fresh, but there is impressive concentration here and the wine should age very well. †

92

CHAMPAGNE 2006

The wines of this vintage are generally finer and more linear in style

A.R. Lenoble Chouilly Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

Silky, soft and floral with notes of ripe apple and toast, this is a delicate and very elegant Champagne that speaks softly and risks being overwhelmed, yet surprises with its low-key persistence. †

90

Demièr-Ansiot Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

Another strong performance from Demièr-Ansiot with a spicy lemon fruit character and some subtle yeasty notes on the nose accompanied by fresh acidity balancing a nice density. The mousse is fine and persistent, and the length is good. Impressive. †

94

Charles Ellner Prestige Brut 2006

Here the wine is very well balanced and fine, with lots of toasted brioche notes and a lush ripe pear and hawthorn nose. One of the most interesting wines in the range, the low dosage of 6 grams per liter keeps it fresh and dynamic through the lingering finish. †

91

G.H. Mumm Brut 2006

With seven years in the cellar prior to release, this shows notes of baked apples and brioche with a hint of smoke. The texture is creamy and soft, and the mousse is somewhat lazy on the palate. Luxurious but lacks tension. †

90

Dehors Maisoncelle Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2006

This delicious expression of Champagne de terroir intrigues with notes of spice, fresh flowers and toast as well as an approachably silky texture. Fermented in cask and bottled after the base wine has had a year on the lees, this is well worth seeking out. —

92

Gonet-Medeville Champs d'Alouette Cuvée Theophile Extra Brut 2006

A smoky and yeasty fizz with plenty of depth and character that varies from marzipan and hazelnut to ripe pear and mineral. Dosed at a very low level, this blend of 55% Chardonnay from Le Mesnil and 45% Pinot Noir from Ambonnay is a wonderful expression of these great terroirs. †

91

Wines are listed in alphabetical order

Larmandier-Bernier Vieille Vigne de Cramant Grand Cru Extra Brut 2006

92

A powerful and concentrated wine, this rare single-vineyard Champagne is produced from vines aged 48 to 75 years old and matured in old oak casks. There are notes of passion fruit, apricot, straw and mineral and a dense, powerful feel with crisp acidity and lots of extract. —

Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

93

A wonderful surprise for the vintage, this shows lots of lemony fruit together with a firm mineral underpinning. With fine and vigorous bubbles, the wine is fresh and elegant, yet it also has a powerful side that will help it to age well. †

Louis Roederer Brut 2006

90

A bit closed now, this should age well. At present not much beyond some notes of mineral, smoke and yeast, yet a lively mousse and tightly wound structure demonstrate plenty of potential. —

Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 2006

93

Youthful and fresh, this opens with notes of lemon peel and passion fruit and moves on to fresh flowers, smoke and minerality. Despite a lively mousse and crisp, refreshing texture, it is still more than substantial enough to linger invitingly on the palate. Thoroughly delightful now, but the patient will be rewarded – this will continue to improve for years to come. †

Louis Roederer et Philippe Starck Brut Nature 2006

93

Lively and concentrated, this shows aromas of lime peel, bay leaf and minerality. Fresh but in no way overly tart, there is enough extract here to balance the acidity admirably and lead the wine to a powerful finish. A great example of the Brut Nature style. †

Marguet Père & Fils Sapience Premier Cru Extra Brut 2006

90

Billed as the first prestige cuvée to be certified organic and/or biodynamic, the blend will apparently change each year. Some love its 'natural' appeal, but to me the nose of fresh and bruised apple and slight hint of volatility is less than compelling. While the texture is fresh and crisp on the palate, it seems to lack depth. †

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2006

91

Very fine and lemony fruit on the nose with hints of hawthorn and linden and a subtle baking bread aroma in the background. Half Chardonnay and half Pinot Noir from the north slope of the Montagne, it has a bright, dynamic feel on the palate and silky finesse on the finish that is charming indeed. Should age well. †

Pertois-Moriset Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

91

Disgorged only this year, this is a lovely, subtle Champagne. It is not particularly forward, but structured, complex and quite pleasant to drink now. †

Philipponnat Cuvée 1522 Grand Cru Extra Brut 2006

91

Named for the year the house was founded, Cuvée 1522 uses grand cru fruit, fermented in cask and lightly dosed to produce top results. Restrained, almost closed, this shows notes of hazelnut, fig, toast and ripe pear that are very youthful and fresh given the seven years spent on the lees. Lovely. †

Piper-Heidsieck Brut 2006

90

From nearly equal proportions of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, this has a warm, toasty aroma of ripe apple with a hint of marmalade and smoke. Although showing some maturity already, this has the substance to age and develop over the mid-term. †

Taittinger Brut 2006

91

Correct but not overly expressive, there are vague floral and ripe peach aromas with a bit of smoke. Shows a pleasant density and rewarding length, but the finish is a bit soft and lacking in definition. †



CHAMPAGNE 2005

Exotic, tropical notes distinguish this exuberant vintage

- Ayala Cuvée Perle d'Ayala Brut 2005** ★ 96
80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir, all from grands crus, this is aged under cork and disgorged after almost nine years on the lees. The result is a wine you should make it your mission to get to know: very creamy, dense and complex, it starts with gingerbread, licorice and cinnamon, brioche and cream, and gradually reveals ripe pear, baked apple and a honeyed note. The structure is velvety and the finish is very long. Only 2,000 bottles are made per year. —
- Bollinger La Grande Année Brut 2005** 92
Exotic notes of coconut, mango and lychee with a backbone of marzipan and smoke; this is a lushly silky Champagne, not overly structured but very complex with some pleasant astringency from the cask ferments. Lay this down for best effect – it should show very well in five years. —
- Charles Ellner Seduction Brut 2005** 90
Bright forward aromas of coconut, lychee and mandarin peel spring seductively from the glass. The vigorous mousse supports the supple, velvety texture and the whole package is held together with lively acidity and admirable density. Lovely. †
- Diebolt-Vallois Fleur de Passion Blanc de Blancs Brut 2005** 93
A marvelous Champagne showing exotic notes of tropical fruit, hibiscus and honey. Surprisingly persistent, it has a richness that is superbly balanced by fresh acidity and a lively structure that continue on the palate long after the wine is gone. A reference point for the region, produced from low-yielding old vines in grand cru Cramant. —
- Gaston Chiquet Special Club Grand Cru Brut 2005** 90
Satisfying notes of fresh cream with a hint of fresh pear and spice and a pleasantly toasty note. On the palate, however, this lacks vibrancy and concentration and finishes a bit soft and short. †
- Henriot Brut 2005** 92
A lovely Champagne, with pleasant notes of fresh orchard fruit plus floral and mineral notes. On the palate there is a generosity, but also firm structure, a vigorous mousse, and nice length. †
- J. Lassalle Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2005** 90
Ripe tropical fruit aromas with a pronounced note of truffle, the aromatics are starting to fade and the wine is a bit soft, creating an impression of somewhat decadent luxury. †
- Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut 2005** 92
Generous and forward, even a slightly tropical note with the freshness of mango and lychee but also some classic notes of ripe pear, candied orange peel and spice. The low dosage keeps the wine lively and dynamic on the palate and helps to balance the richness of the aromatics. A marvelous wine. †
- Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut 2005** 91
Pleasantly floral, this shows notes of golden apples and fresh cream. The very ripe vintage has delivered a creamy mouthfeel and satisfying richness and density. From a house very much on the way up. †
- Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut 2005** 91
This Champagne opens with notes of lemon peel, ground coffee and minerality and continues to a rich, creamy texture, balanced acidity and lingering finish. Seductively luxuriant, this would work with a variety of food. †
- R.H. Coutier Ambonnay Grand Cru Brut 2005** 91
Aromas of ripe passion fruit and star fruit – tropical, but not over-ripe, with a suggestion of fresh flowers. This shows a silky texture that manages freshness and depth at the same time – absolutely delicious, a wine to seek out. —
- Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut 2005** 91
A wine of marvelous concentration and elegance, with refined aromas of ripe apple, white flowers and a hint of mineral. Sourced exclusively from grand cru fruit in Avize, Le Mesnil, Oger, and Chouilly. Supple and velvety in texture, it lacks nothing in substance or power and should age for decades. A bit softer than the 2004, it is still a wine to seek out. †
- Veuve A. Devaux D Brut 2005** 90
Pleasant, if a bit awkward. Shows attractive floral notes and citrus fruit on the nose, but the palate is a bit heavy with a powerful structure and a certain lack of finesse. †

Wines are listed in alphabetical order

CHAMPAGNE 2004

A fine vintage now approaching full maturity

Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 94

Citrus peel, coconut and freshly buttered toast aromas surprise here, marrying beautifully with a saline note and wispy floral accents to yield a lovely richness. The wine is very elegant, very fine, but also powerful and impressively long. A super bottle of wine. —

Bollinger La Grande Année Brut 2004 93

A massive wine, this is slightly closed down at present, although one can sense the future potential. Smoky, saline and toasty, this shows pear fruit with a hint of country bread, hazelnut and coffee. The texture is creamy and rich, and if it is a bit closed right now, it will ultimately outlive the 2005. —

Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs 2004 90

A very sexy wine for drinking now, this is nine years on the lees and somewhat teetering towards full maturity. The nose shows tropical fruit and a bit of ground coffee, and while the palate retains its bright acidity, it has developed a slightly bitter finish. —

Charles Ellner Prestige Brut 2004 90

Perhaps slightly more evolved than one would hope at this point, this begins with notes of lychee and quickly progresses to brioche, apricot jam and even a hint of truffle. The texture is rich, slightly sweet and lush, yet it retains good balance and shows the breeding of the vintage. —

Dehours Maisoncelle Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2004 91

A Champagne with a wonderful nervous energy, this shows bright aromas of lime peel, smoke and mineral notes along with a fine, biscuity autolytic character. Very fine and very elegant with racy acidity and penetrating length. This is a wonderful Champagne that should open up considerably in the years to come. —

Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 94

Lemon yellow with hints of green, this shows notes of mineral and lemon peel initially and with time opens up to demonstrate nice toasty autolysis and a fine creamy mousse. The finish is lingering and very complex. A superb blanc de blancs. —

Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2004 91

Notes of biscuit, toast and a bit of lemon on the attack, with a sumptuously creamy texture and fine richness and density that is balanced by a nicely lively acidity. Good depth and ampleur. —

Le Brun-Servenay Exhilarante Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru Brut 2004 92

Exhilaratingly clean and fresh, this sports bright lemony fruit and hints of minerality. On the palate it is crisp, dense and long. A blend of 80% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Meunier and 10% Pinot Noir, it has a completely different feel to the Brut NV from the same house. —

Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon Brut 2004 94

Fresh and lovely, with pronounced aromas that mingle ripe apple, toasted brioche and a mineral edge. Very vigorous mousse, crisp acidity and great finesse, yet not lacking the substance to ensure a lingering, complex finish. Truly a great vintage of Dom Pérignon. —

Pascal Doquet Le Mesnil-Sur-Oger Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 92

A beautiful, concentrated blanc de blancs with aromas that range from bright lemon peel to mineral to ripe pear and brioche. This cuvée is produced from vines at the heart of the Le Mesnil slope with the best expositions. It is fresh and clean yet concentrated and long. Marvelous. —

Paul Bara Bouzy Grand Cru Brut Réserve 2004 93

With pronounced notes of ripe apple, fresh flowers and marzipan, this makes an impressive impact on the attack and follows up with a texture that is powerful and long yet without any heaviness. Superb vintage Champagne that will last for years in the cellar. —

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2004 93

A very credible Belle Epoque. On the nose it combines notes of ripe apple, cream and toasted brioche. On the palate it shows both a lovely finesse and a vibrant, refreshing mousse. Between them, they carry the wine to an impressive finish. —



Pierre Moncuit Le Mesnil Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004

92

Very attractive aromas of toasted bread and fresh pastry emerge on the nose, with a lively passion fruit and citrus character following through on the palate. The mousse is elegant, the acidity fresh without being acerbic, and the impressive concentration leads to an elegant finish. Marvelous vintage, very successful. **!**

Pierre Paillard Bouzy Grand Cru Brut 2004

92

This is a great example of a grower Champagne from the Montagne that has power but perfect balance, with a forward toasty aroma and nuance of marzipan, white flowers and ripe apple along with a good shot of minerality. There is lovely depth and concentration here, from a judicious blend of half Pinot Noir, half Chardonnay, dosed at just 3 grams per liter. Superb. **—**

Piper-Heidsieck Brut 2004

90

As has been the tradition at this house, this is dominated by Pinot Noir, making for a firm, masculine Champagne with an edge of truffle and marzipan. Rich, yet not lacking in finesse or elegance, it is a very attractive offering, showing lovely complexity and depth. **!**

Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004

94

A marvelous wine with aromas of ripe Bosc pear and the beginning of a note of gingerbread, even a suggestion of fresh truffle emerging. The texture is balanced, crisp and lovely, with a creamy mousse and a superbly elegant feel on the palate. I could drink this all night long. **—**

Pol Roger Brut 2004

93

Imposing and rich, this shows a creamy, toasty note to the ripe apple fruit along with a suggestion of hazelnut and mandarin peel. Densely structured and somewhat closed it should open up in a few years to be an absolute wonder. **—**

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 ★

95

A standout wine in a strong vintage, this shows very primary aromas that range from lemon and mineral to exotic passion fruit. With a fine and abundant mousse, the wine has lots of finesse but still a great density that gently coats the palate and brings it to a lingering finish. **—**

Veuve Clicquot Brut 2004

92

Fresh and elegant, this is light in color but with powerful aromas of lemon, fresh flowers, spice and cream. There is no heaviness, however, and the wine is superbly balanced straight through to the satisfying finish. **!**

Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame Brut 2004

93

Distinct notes of black truffle point to a bit of age; the Pinot Noir dominates the nose, but in a friendly, accessible way. Lush yet balanced by crisp acidity and good length. Luxurious without being top-heavy. Lovely. **!**

Vilmart & Cie Coeur de Cuvée Premier Cru Brut 2004

91

Classic wine from the Montagne de Reims, with apricot, fresh chervil and roast almond. Impressive, but quite a mouthful – rich, powerful, dense and long. Not for the fainthearted, produced only with the first pressing of old vine fruit from the top vineyard, known as Blanches Voies. **—**

ROSÉ CHAMPAGNE

From delicate to full bodied, and fruity to savory

Bollinger La Grande Année Rosé Brut 2004

93

Starting to open now, this shows hints of ground coffee, ripe black cherry, and a dark, deep plummy fruit. Firm, vinous, and more structured, the final effect is really quite lovely. Huge potential for aging this wine. **—**

Bollinger La Grande Année Rosé Brut 2005

92

A nose of exuberant wild strawberries touched with licorice, violets and a hint of smoke. Still only 5% red grapes, but they lend a solid core of structure, although the final effect remains silky and elegant. Worth waiting to broach this – it should show best in five years. **—**

Bollinger Rosé Brut NV

91

A serious, vinous rosé with a nose of cherry fruit colored by an almost savory element along with hints of truffle and smoke. On the palate the wine is substantial but not heavy, coating the mouth and lingering on the finish. **!**

Camille Savès Bouzy Grand Cru Rosé Brut NV

92

A beautiful expression of the type, with a perfumed, floral element to the cherry fruit and a bright lemony acidity on the palate. In spite of the rather ethereal nature of the wine, it has a lovely, lingering finish. **!**

Wines are listed in alphabetical order

CHAMPAGNE 2009

The first releases of smaller producers from this young vintage

Agrapart & Fils Avizoise Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2009

92

This Champagne shows vast potential. Although it is slightly backwards and reduced at this point, it almost drips with mineral, lime peel and smoky aromas. A superb expression of Avize. —

Agrapart & Fils Minéral Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2009

91

Showing bright lemony fruit with just a hint of passion fruit accented by notes of smoke, toast and limey chalk, this is a mineral wine indeed. The texture is fine and elegant, yet it expresses well the richness of the 2009 vintage in spite of the fact that it lacks the added sugar of the dosage. —

Agrapart & Fils Venus Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2009

93

A superb grower tête de cuvée, the Venus bottling has a compellingly sweet/tart lemon cream aroma with hints of mineral and brioche and a creamy, rich, dense texture that is supple and silky yet profoundly deep. —

Cédric Bouchard Roses de Jeanne La Bolorée Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009

92

Elegant and fine with a floral twist to the nose, this is rich but not heavy, with balanced acidity and a very pleasant texture. It is produced from a small vineyard of old vine Pinot Blanc in the Aube by one of the top young growers to watch. †

David Léclapart L'Apôtre Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2009

90

This is the most convincing of all the Champagnes produced by David Léclapart. Made from 100% cask-fermented old vine Chardonnay from Trépail, it has a richly truffly aroma and a dense, creamy texture that leads to a lovely lingering finish. †

Emmanuel Brochet Les Hauts Chardonnay Extra Brut 2009

93

Superb Champagne, with a rich green apple and crème fraîche nose and a dense, luxurious texture. This is a sexy and seductive style, produced from old vine fruit grown on limey soils. Wonderful. —

Francis Boulard Les Rachais Brut Nature 2009

92

Crisp, fresh Champagne with a penetrating lemon peel and mineral note on the nose and a lovely tension on the palate. An expressive, elegant fizz with verve but also real concentration. †

Franck Pascal Harmonie Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2009

90

This blanc de noirs style of Champagne has a surprisingly mineral note on the nose and then a classic combination of red fruit and floral character, reflecting the 50:50 split between Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Crisp and elegant on the palate, it has moderate length and a balanced finish. †

J.L. Vergnon Confidence Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2009

92

This engaging Champagne from Le Mesnil has a pronounced aroma of green apple and spice with a firm mineral edge. The wine is fermented in cask and bottled without filtration, giving it a soft, tender texture. Lovely! †

Laherte Frères Les Empreintes Brut Nature 2009

92

Lovely, expressive aromas of coconut and exotic fruit rush from the glass of this exemplary biodynamic Champagne. Fresh and lively yet complete and round, this 50:50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir is fermented in cask on natural yeasts and dosed at 4 grams per liter. Marvelous. —

Lancelot-Pienne Cuvée Marie Lancelot Cramant Grand Cru Brut 2009

92

Very pleasant notes of lemon peel and toast open this wine, which goes on to show impressive density and charming finesse. Lightly dosed, it is a marvelous expression of the terroir of grand cru Cramant. †



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**Marie Courtin Efflorescence
Extra Brut 2009**

91

Intensely concentrated and tightly wound, this is 100% Pinot Noir. It is fermented in cask and released without any dosage. With a prominent yeasty character and hints of flowers and toasted almond, it is a delicious wine that should develop quite well with time in the bottle. —

**Marie-Noelle Ledru Cuvée du Goulé
Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Brut 2009**

93

With lovely intensity and a great depth of flavor, this is a marvelous wine. Expect ripe apricot fruit, hints of toasted brioche and a suggestion of hazelnut continuing into a creamy mousse, with balanced acidity and a long finish. Bravo. —

**Pierre Paillard Les Mailletteres Acte 1
Bouzy Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut 2009**

91

A blanc de noirs Champagne – 100% Pinot Noir – that has kept its feminine side, with notes of fresh flowers, ripe pear and toast. The texture is softly elegant, but in no way lacking structure, due to the low dosage and the concentration of the fruit, which lead to a lingering finish. Marvelous. —

**Pierre Paillard Les Mottelettes Acte 1
Bouzy Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2009**

90

Citrus and chalk, mineral and verve – a classic blanc de blancs, except that this one is from the heart of the Montagne de Reims. There is a wonderful concentration and intensity here along with balance that manifests itself in a line and length that is truly admirable. A wine worth seeking out. —

CHAMPAGNE 2008

Bigger name releases with more bottle age are starting to emerge

**A. Margaine Premier Cru
Blanc de Blancs Brut 2008**

91

A rich style of Chardonnay that almost resembles the Pinot Noir grown elsewhere here, via floral, nutty aromas and a richness and density on the palate that belies its origin. A lush, lovely wine. —

Chartogne-Taillet Brut 2008

91

Pinot Noir dominates here, giving the wine a floral note to complement the crisp citrus fruit and the mineral and almond notes. From a single vineyard called Les Couarres, this shows a fresh, lively character that pairs well with the tender, supple fruit expression. —

**Emmanuel Brochet Les Hauts Meuniers
Extra Brut 2008**

92

Exotic notes of pomelo and tangerine mingle with fresh floral notes for an enchanting whole, while the structured yet silky and expressive texture, supported by fresh acidity, leads to a lingering, subtle finish. —

Gatinois Aÿ Grand Cru Brut 2008

92

From the grand cru village of Aÿ, this is concentrated and powerful, with notes of ripe pear, marzipan, fresh flowers and toast. Made from 100% Pinot Noir, the texture is wine-like and solid, with a firmly mineral underpinning, but this never loses sight of elegance and finesse. A truly marvelous Champagne. —

**Hébrart Rive Gauche Rive Droite
Grand Cru Extra Brut 2008**

91

Intense aromas of passion fruit, guava and pomelo highlight this wine, with spice and toast notes developing with a bit of time. Balanced acidity and a rich mouthfeel lead to a rich, lingering finish. Fermented in cask and lightly dosed, this is surprisingly delicious. —

**J.L. Vergnon Expression
Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2008**

91

Pure, citrusy and clean, this lightly dosed wine from Oger has an undercurrent of mineral and toast aromas. There is a great delicacy of expression here, yet the lively acidity gives the wine impressive power as well. —

**Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs
Brut 2008**

92

Lemony and fine, this shows a marvelous creamy autolysis character and a nice intensity and depth of flavor. Crisp yet creamy on the palate this blanc de blancs has wonderful balance and length. —



Louis Roederer Brut 2008

Creamy notes of ripe apple, toasted brioche, mineral and smoke combine to provide a compelling aromatic palate to this young wine. Fresh yet satisfyingly substantial, this drinks well now but will only improve over the next decade. —

92

Nicolas Maillart Les Francs de Pied Premier Cru Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2008

Interesting and delicious, this 100% Pinot Noir is produced from ungrafted vines. Winemaking is done in cask, and wines are very lightly dosed, which combines to produce a gentle floral nose with red fruit and earth, a moderately vigorous mousse and good tension and length on the palate. 🍷

91

Marguet Père & Fils Ambonnay Grand Cru Les Crayères 2008

An impressive wine with a lovely concentration and depth of flavor, it features toasted brioche and a wonderful melange of roast walnut, ripe pear, smoke and mineral aromas. With 18 months on the cork after disgorging, it is starting to open up now and showing a rich, lingering finish. A wine to seek out. 🍷

93

Philipponnat Blanc de Noirs Brut 2008

Boasting notes of marzipan, hawthorn, ripe pear and a hint of plum, this is the wine formerly called the Réserve Millésime. Now 100% Pinot Noir, with five years on the lees it has picked up weight and power. A structured, powerful wine, it is half fermented in cask, half in tank to give it flesh and depth. Well done. 🍷

92

Marie-Noelle Ledru Cuvée du Goulté Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs Brut 2008

Structured and a bit strict on the attack, with time this powerful Champagne reveals lots of floral and marzipan notes and very vinous Pinot Noir fruit. Powerful and dense, this should be marvelous with a few more years of age. 🍷

93

Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2008

Almost already quaffable in its charm, the fruit here is less forward than the 2004, but the beginning of expressive notes of citrus and linden and just a hint of smoke and mineral are starting to emerge nicely. The texture is firmly structured and fresh, but there is impressive concentration here and the wine should age very well. 🍷

92

CHAMPAGNE 2006

The wines of this vintage are generally finer and more linear in style

A.R. Lenoble Chouilly Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

Silky, soft and floral with notes of ripe apple and toast, this is a delicate and very elegant Champagne that speaks softly and risks being overwhelmed, yet surprises with its low-key persistence. 🍷

90

Demière-Ansiot Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

Another strong performance from Demière-Ansiot with a spicy lemon fruit character and some subtle yeasty notes on the nose accompanied by fresh acidity balancing a nice density. The mousse is fine and persistent, and the length is good. Impressive. 🍷

94

Charles Ellner Prestige Brut 2006

Here the wine is very well balanced and fine, with lots of toasted brioche notes and a lush ripe pear and hawthorn nose. One of the most interesting wines in the range, the low dosage of 6 grams per liter keeps it fresh and dynamic through the lingering finish. 🍷

91

G.H. Mumm Brut 2006

With seven years in the cellar prior to release, this shows notes of baked apples and brioche with a hint of smoke. The texture is creamy and soft, and the mousse is somewhat lazy on the palate. Luxurious but lacks tension. 🍷

90

Dehors Maisoncelle Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2006

This delicious expression of Champagne de terroir intrigues with notes of spice, fresh flowers and toast as well as an approachably silky texture. Fermented in cask and bottled after the base wine has had a year on the lees, this is well worth seeking out. —

92

Gonet-Medeville Champs d'Alouette Cuvée Theophile Extra Brut 2006

A smoky and yeasty fizz with plenty of depth and character that varies from marzipan and hazelnut to ripe pear and mineral. Dosed at a very low level, this blend of 55% Chardonnay from Le Mesnil and 45% Pinot Noir from Ambonnay is a wonderful expression of these great terroirs. 🍷

91

Wines are listed in alphabetical order

Larmandier-Bernier Vieille Vigne de Cramant Grand Cru Extra Brut 2006

92

A powerful and concentrated wine, this rare single-vineyard Champagne is produced from vines aged 48 to 75 years old and matured in old oak casks. There are notes of passion fruit, apricot, straw and mineral and a dense, powerful feel with crisp acidity and lots of extract. —

Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

93

A wonderful surprise for the vintage, this shows lots of lemony fruit together with a firm mineral underpinning. With fine and vigorous bubbles, the wine is fresh and elegant, yet it also has a powerful side that will help it to age well. †

Louis Roederer Brut 2006

90

A bit closed now, this should age well. At present not much beyond some notes of mineral, smoke and yeast, yet a lively mousse and tightly wound structure demonstrate plenty of potential. —

Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 2006

93

Youthful and fresh, this opens with notes of lemon peel and passion fruit and moves on to fresh flowers, smoke and minerality. Despite a lively mousse and crisp, refreshing texture, it is still more than substantial enough to linger invitingly on the palate. Thoroughly delightful now, but the patient will be rewarded – this will continue to improve for years to come. †

Louis Roederer et Philippe Starck Brut Nature 2006

93

Lively and concentrated, this shows aromas of lime peel, bay leaf and minerality. Fresh but in no way overly tart, there is enough extract here to balance the acidity admirably and lead the wine to a powerful finish. A great example of the Brut Nature style. †

Marguet Père & Fils Sapience Premier Cru Extra Brut 2006

90

Billed as the first prestige cuvée to be certified organic and/or biodynamic, the blend will apparently change each year. Some love its 'natural' appeal, but to me the nose of fresh and bruised apple and slight hint of volatility is less than compelling. While the texture is fresh and crisp on the palate, it seems to lack depth. †

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2006

91

Very fine and lemony fruit on the nose with hints of hawthorn and linden and a subtle baking bread aroma in the background. Half Chardonnay and half Pinot Noir from the north slope of the Montagne, it has a bright, dynamic feel on the palate and silky finesse on the finish that is charming indeed. Should age well. †

Pertois-Moriset Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2006

91

Disgorged only this year, this is a lovely, subtle Champagne. It is not particularly forward, but structured, complex and quite pleasant to drink now. †

Philipponnat Cuvée 1522 Grand Cru Extra Brut 2006

91

Named for the year the house was founded, Cuvée 1522 uses grand cru fruit, fermented in cask and lightly dosed to produce top results. Restrained, almost closed, this shows notes of hazelnut, fig, toast and ripe pear that are very youthful and fresh given the seven years spent on the lees. Lovely. †

Piper-Heidsieck Brut 2006

90

From nearly equal proportions of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, this has a warm, toasty aroma of ripe apple with a hint of marmalade and smoke. Although showing some maturity already, this has the substance to age and develop over the mid-term. †

Taittinger Brut 2006

91

Correct but not overly expressive, there are vague floral and ripe peach aromas with a bit of smoke. Shows a pleasant density and rewarding length, but the finish is a bit soft and lacking in definition. †



CHAMPAGNE 2005

Exotic, tropical notes distinguish this exuberant vintage

- Ayala Cuvée Perle d'Ayala Brut 2005** ★ 96
80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir, all from grands crus, this is aged under cork and disgorged after almost nine years on the lees. The result is a wine you should make it your mission to get to know: very creamy, dense and complex, it starts with gingerbread, licorice and cinnamon, brioche and cream, and gradually reveals ripe pear, baked apple and a honeyed note. The structure is velvety and the finish is very long. Only 2,000 bottles are made per year. —
- Bollinger La Grande Année Brut 2005** 92
Exotic notes of coconut, mango and lychee with a backbone of marzipan and smoke; this is a lushly silky Champagne, not overly structured but very complex with some pleasant astringency from the cask ferments. Lay this down for best effect – it should show very well in five years. —
- Charles Ellner Seduction Brut 2005** 90
Bright forward aromas of coconut, lychee and mandarin peel spring seductively from the glass. The vigorous mousse supports the supple, velvety texture and the whole package is held together with lively acidity and admirable density. Lovely. †
- Diebolt-Vallois Fleur de Passion Blanc de Blancs Brut 2005** 93
A marvelous Champagne showing exotic notes of tropical fruit, hibiscus and honey. Surprisingly persistent, it has a richness that is superbly balanced by fresh acidity and a lively structure that continue on the palate long after the wine is gone. A reference point for the region, produced from low-yielding old vines in grand cru Cramant. —
- Gaston Chiquet Special Club Grand Cru Brut 2005** 90
Satisfying notes of fresh cream with a hint of fresh pear and spice and a pleasantly toasty note. On the palate, however, this lacks vibrancy and concentration and finishes a bit soft and short. †
- Henriot Brut 2005** 92
A lovely Champagne, with pleasant notes of fresh orchard fruit plus floral and mineral notes. On the palate there is a generosity, but also firm structure, a vigorous mousse, and nice length. †
- J. Lassalle Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2005** 90
Ripe tropical fruit aromas with a pronounced note of truffle, the aromatics are starting to fade and the wine is a bit soft, creating an impression of somewhat decadent luxury. †
- Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut 2005** 92
Generous and forward, even a slightly tropical note with the freshness of mango and lychee but also some classic notes of ripe pear, candied orange peel and spice. The low dosage keeps the wine lively and dynamic on the palate and helps to balance the richness of the aromatics. A marvelous wine. †
- Philipponnat Grand Blanc Brut 2005** 91
Pleasantly floral, this shows notes of golden apples and fresh cream. The very ripe vintage has delivered a creamy mouthfeel and satisfying richness and density. From a house very much on the way up. †
- Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut 2005** 91
This Champagne opens with notes of lemon peel, ground coffee and minerality and continues to a rich, creamy texture, balanced acidity and lingering finish. Seductively luxuriant, this would work with a variety of food. †
- R.H. Coutier Ambonnay Grand Cru Brut 2005** 91
Aromas of ripe passion fruit and star fruit – tropical, but not over-ripe, with a suggestion of fresh flowers. This shows a silky texture that manages freshness and depth at the same time – absolutely delicious, a wine to seek out. —
- Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut 2005** 91
A wine of marvelous concentration and elegance, with refined aromas of ripe apple, white flowers and a hint of mineral. Sourced exclusively from grand cru fruit in Avize, Le Mesnil, Oger, and Chouilly. Supple and velvety in texture, it lacks nothing in substance or power and should age for decades. A bit softer than the 2004, it is still a wine to seek out. †
- Veuve A. Devaux D Brut 2005** 90
Pleasant, if a bit awkward. Shows attractive floral notes and citrus fruit on the nose, but the palate is a bit heavy with a powerful structure and a certain lack of finesse. †

Wines are listed in alphabetical order

CHAMPAGNE 2004

A fine vintage now approaching full maturity

- Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004** 94
Citrus peel, coconut and freshly buttered toast aromas surprise here, marrying beautifully with a saline note and wispy floral accents to yield a lovely richness. The wine is very elegant, very fine, but also powerful and impressively long. A super bottle of wine. —
- Bollinger La Grande Année Brut 2004** 93
A massive wine, this is slightly closed down at present, although one can sense the future potential. Smoky, saline and toasty, this shows pear fruit with a hint of country bread, hazelnut and coffee. The texture is creamy and rich, and if it is a bit closed right now, it will ultimately outlive the 2005. —
- Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs 2004** 90
A very sexy wine for drinking now, this is nine years on the lees and somewhat teetering towards full maturity. The nose shows tropical fruit and a bit of ground coffee, and while the palate retains its bright acidity, it has developed a slightly bitter finish. †
- Charles Ellner Prestige Brut 2004** 90
Perhaps slightly more evolved than one would hope at this point, this begins with notes of lychee and quickly progresses to brioche, apricot jam and even a hint of truffle. The texture is rich, slightly sweet and lush, yet it retains good balance and shows the breeding of the vintage. †
- Dehurs Maisoncelle Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2004** 91
A Champagne with a wonderful nervous energy, this shows bright aromas of lime peel, smoke and mineral notes along with a fine, biscuity autolytic character. Very fine and very elegant with racy acidity and penetrating length. This is a wonderful Champagne that should open up considerably in the years to come. †
- Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004** 94
Lemon yellow with hints of green, this shows notes of mineral and lemon peel initially and with time opens up to demonstrate nice toasty autolysis and a fine creamy mousse. The finish is lingering and very complex. A superb blanc de blancs. †
- Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2004** 91
Notes of biscuit, toast and a bit of lemon on the attack, with a sumptuously creamy texture and fine richness and density that is balanced by a nicely lively acidity. Good depth and ampleur. †
- Le Brun-Servenay Exhilarante Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru Brut 2004** 92
Exhilaratingly clean and fresh, this sports bright lemony fruit and hints of minerality. On the palate it is crisp, dense and long. A blend of 80% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Meunier and 10% Pinot Noir, it has a completely different feel to the Brut NV from the same house. †
- Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon Brut 2004** 94
Fresh and lovely, with pronounced aromas that mingle ripe apple, toasted brioche and a mineral edge. Very vigorous mousse, crisp acidity and great finesse, yet not lacking the substance to ensure a lingering, complex finish. Truly a great vintage of Dom Pérignon. —
- Pascal Doquet Le Mesnil-Sur-Oger Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004** 92
A beautiful, concentrated blanc de blancs with aromas that range from bright lemon peel to mineral to ripe pear and brioche. This cuvée is produced from vines at the heart of the Le Mesnil slope with the best expositions. It is fresh and clean yet concentrated and long. Marvelous. —
- Paul Bara Bouzy Grand Cru Brut Réserve 2004** 93
With pronounced notes of ripe apple, fresh flowers and marzipan, this makes an impressive impact on the attack and follows up with a texture that is powerful and long yet without any heaviness. Superb vintage Champagne that will last for years in the cellar. †
- Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2004** 93
A very credible Belle Epoque. On the nose it combines notes of ripe apple, cream and toasted brioche. On the palate it shows both a lovely finesse and a vibrant, refreshing mousse. Between them, they carry the wine to an impressive finish. —



Pierre Moncuit Le Mesnil Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004

92

Very attractive aromas of toasted bread and fresh pastry emerge on the nose, with a lively passion fruit and citrus character following through on the palate. The mousse is elegant, the acidity fresh without being acerbic, and the impressive concentration leads to an elegant finish. Marvelous vintage, very successful. **!**

Pierre Paillard Bouzy Grand Cru Brut 2004

92

This is a great example of a grower Champagne from the Montagne that has power but perfect balance, with a forward toasty aroma and nuance of marzipan, white flowers and ripe apple along with a good shot of minerality. There is lovely depth and concentration here, from a judicious blend of half Pinot Noir, half Chardonnay, dosed at just 3 grams per liter. Superb. **—**

Piper-Heidsieck Brut 2004

90

As has been the tradition at this house, this is dominated by Pinot Noir, making for a firm, masculine Champagne with an edge of truffle and marzipan. Rich, yet not lacking in finesse or elegance, it is a very attractive offering, showing lovely complexity and depth. **!**

Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004

94

A marvelous wine with aromas of ripe Bosc pear and the beginning of a note of gingerbread, even a suggestion of fresh truffle emerging. The texture is balanced, crisp and lovely, with a creamy mousse and a superbly elegant feel on the palate. I could drink this all night long. **—**

Pol Roger Brut 2004

93

Imposing and rich, this shows a creamy, toasty note to the ripe apple fruit along with a suggestion of hazelnut and mandarin peel. Densely structured and somewhat closed it should open up in a few years to be an absolute wonder. **—**

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 **★**

95

A standout wine in a strong vintage, this shows very primary aromas that range from lemon and mineral to exotic passion fruit. With a fine and abundant mousse, the wine has lots of finesse but still a great density that gently coats the palate and brings it to a lingering finish. **—**

Veuve Clicquot Brut 2004

92

Fresh and elegant, this is light in color but with powerful aromas of lemon, fresh flowers, spice and cream. There is no heaviness, however, and the wine is superbly balanced straight through to the satisfying finish. **!**

Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame Brut 2004

93

Distinct notes of black truffle point to a bit of age; the Pinot Noir dominates the nose, but in a friendly, accessible way. Lush yet balanced by crisp acidity and good length. Luxurious without being top-heavy. Lovely. **!**

Vilmart & Cie Coeur de Cuvée Premier Cru Brut 2004

91

Classic wine from the Montagne de Reims, with apricot, fresh chervil and roast almond. Impressive, but quite a mouthful – rich, powerful, dense and long. Not for the fainthearted, produced only with the first pressing of old vine fruit from the top vineyard, known as Blanches Voies. **—**

ROSÉ CHAMPAGNE

From delicate to full bodied, and fruity to savory

Bollinger La Grande Année Rosé Brut 2004

93

Starting to open now, this shows hints of ground coffee, ripe black cherry, and a dark, deep plummy fruit. Firm, vinous, and more structured, the final effect is really quite lovely. Huge potential for aging this wine. **—**

Bollinger La Grande Année Rosé Brut 2005

92

A nose of exuberant wild strawberries touched with licorice, violets and a hint of smoke. Still only 5% red grapes, but they lend a solid core of structure, although the final effect remains silky and elegant. Worth waiting to broach this – it should show best in five years. **—**

Bollinger Rosé Brut NV

91

A serious, vinous rosé with a nose of cherry fruit colored by an almost savory element along with hints of truffle and smoke. On the palate the wine is substantial but not heavy, coating the mouth and lingering on the finish. **!**

Camille Savès Bouzy Grand Cru Rosé Brut NV

92

A beautiful expression of the type, with a perfumed, floral element to the cherry fruit and a bright lemony acidity on the palate. In spite of the rather ethereal nature of the wine, it has a lovely, lingering finish. **!**

Wines are listed in alphabetical order

Dom Ruinart Rosé Brut 1988 ★

95

An astoundingly wonderful rosé Champagne, showing a perfect array of cherry, toasted brioche and yeasty aromas with just a hint of truffle. The wine has a surprisingly youthful character: plenty of mousse, a vibrant acidity and a tender texture. Definitely still on the way up, this should last for 10 or 20 years. 🍷

Francis Boulard Les Rachais Rosé Brut Nature 2005

91

A fine, elegant rosé de saignée, with a restrained red fruit expression and a lovely lemony acidity on the palate. There is a combination of delicacy and depth here that is surprising for a blanc de noirs made from 100% Pinot Noir. Well done. 🍷

Gatinois Aÿ Grand Cru Rosé Brut NV

91

A splash of Chardonnay enlivens this predominantly Pinot Noir-based blend from Aÿ, giving fresh floral notes to the berry fruit and a remarkable degree of elegance to the wine. The texture is silky and crisp but there is an underlying firmness to the whole that means it will work well with food. 🍷

Henriot Rosé Brut NV

91

Very successful. A red-Burgundy-like nose of cherry and earth and a firm vinous character on the palate give this a creamy texture and very nice length. 🍷

J.L. Vergnon Rosémotion Grand Cru Rosé Extra Brut NV

91

A crystalline, fine example of rosé, there is an attractive light pink color and just a hint of raspberry fruit from the 10% Pinot Noir from grand cru Mailly used here. The floral nature of the wine comes through quite directly and the wine lingers engagingly on the palate. 🍷

Krug Rosé Brut NV

94

Surprisingly light in color, this is supremely elegant, with pretty floral aromas and solid red berry fruit. Delicate, almost soft, the texture is creamy and fine. 🍷

Lallier Grand Cru Rosé Brut NV

91

Made using the 'lasagne method' (fermenting layers of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the same tank for 16 to 17 hours), giving great aromatic elegance and a lovely, velvety texture to the mousse. Worth seeking out. 🍷

Louis Roederer Rosé Brut 2008

92

Appealingly pale pink in color, this has a surprising volume of black cherry fruit touched with mineral, smoke and a hint of spice. There is fresh acidity to keep it lively, yet this wine is meaty enough to accompany a main course to perfection. ➡

Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon Oenothèque Rosé Brut 1992

93

Magnificent, powerful and rich, with concentrated black cherry fruit and hints of toast, smoke and earth. Full bodied, with a velvety rich texture and great length, this could easily pair with robust red meat dishes. Drink or hold. 🍷

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé Brut 2006

92

Notes of raspberry black plum and mango accented with lilac make this appealing on the attack. The texture is silky and fine – not an overly vinous style, it is seductive if a bit light, although it lingers pleasantly on the finish. 🍷

Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Rosé Brut NV

92

Fresh red berry fruit is set off here by hints of flint, mineral and fresh violets. Structured and solid, it is nevertheless still very elegant and fine. With marvelous tension and depth, this is great with food or by itself. 🍷

Pol Roger Extra Cuvée de Reserve Rosé Brut 2004

94

Elegant in the extreme, with ripe-cherry fruit and restrained floral notes, this shows a creamy, soft texture, yet is balanced by a solid acidity and plenty of extract. A wonderful wine, this should age quite well. 🍷

R.H. Coutier Grand Cru Rosé Brut NV

92

A classic from Ambonnay, this is rich yet shows impressive finesse with aromas that begin with violets and fresh fruit and progress to marzipan and toasted brioche. The mousse is lively but elegant, and the wine lingers lovingly on the finish. A top non-vintage rosé. 🍷

Serge et Olivier Horiot Sève En Barmont Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut 2010

92

Sweet cherry fruit and lovely, expressive floral aromas are here complemented by a subtle earth or mineral note and a hint of toast. Vinous but not overly so, it retains an elegance and power that are very rewarding. 🍷

Veuve Clicquot Rosé Brut 2004

94

A powerful wine without being overdone, this shows a ripe, concentrated cherry fruit on the nose with a savory, almost gamey note. On the palate the wine is rich and dense without losing elegance, and the finish is long and very pleasant. Should age well for a decade at least. 🍷

Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame Rosé Brut 2004

93

The first impression here is one of concentrated and focused red berry fruit – this is markedly vinous yet lively and not lacking in freshness. Delightful Champagne and well balanced in spite of its rich quality. 🍷