

WINE News

New treasures from the cellars of Champagne.



OCTOBER 22, 2018 FEATURES

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Top Champagne Buys for the Holidays

By Gary Westby

Holiday celebrations with friends and family are wonderful occasions for Champagne, and this year we have a better-than-ever selection for you at K&L. In these pages you will find articles on two famous houses, Billecart-Salmon and Bollinger, both of which make great Champagne, but in completely different styles. You will also hear from Heather, our director of wine clubs, about the Champagne Club; this is not only a great gift for friends and family, but a fine idea for any Champagne lover. Scotty tells us about the immaculate Grand Cru Champagne of Franck Bonville, and Alex about the revolutionary glassware coming out of Reims by Lehmann Glass.

As for me, like a broken record, I want to talk about value Champagne for the table! While Champagne is never cheap, I feel that it is one of the best values in wine at K&L. No other place in the world offers such painstakingly made wines, aged for us, and delivered at a fair price. The three recommendations below, all below \$30, offer quality that you would have to spend double to get out of any still wine in Napa. They are all made on a human scale by farmers who struggle with some of the most difficult, changeable weather conditions in the world of wine. The results are all elegant, complex and full of pleasure!

Ariston Aspasic “Carte Blanche” Brut Champagne (\$29.99) Before the 2012 harvest, Paul Vincent Ariston made a major investment in new temperature-controlled tanks and a state-of-the-art Coquard diagonal press. It has taken six years for the results of this investment to hit the market! This blend of 40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir and 30% Meunier has the toast that only five years of aging can bring, along with the refreshing zip that wines from this northern edge of Champagne are famous for.



Baron-Fuenté “Grande Réserve” Brut Champagne (750ml \$24.99; 1.5L \$49.99) This Champagne has to be tasted to be believed! Not only does this have a top-quality, small bead and lovely warm baguette aromas, it finishes bright, making it all too easy to drink. The regular bottle is aged for three years, while the magnum gets a minimum of four—if you have a crowd, don’t miss the magnums!



Jean de La Fontaine “L’Éloquente” Brut Champagne (\$29.99) This brand-new direct import is composed of 70% Meunier, 25% Chardonnay and 5% Pinot Noir and has an extroverted personality that is perfect for getting the party started. Light, dry and elegant, this will wow you and your guests with its long finish and easy charm. Like the Baron-Fuenté, this is also aged for three years on the lees.



Cover: No cellar is too deep or too cold for our Champagne team.

The Luxury, Beauty and Value of Lehmann Glassware

By Alex Schroeder

Champagne is made using the most time-consuming methods in the industry, and results in a final product in the glass that is complex, elegant, and ultimately demands deep contemplation and appreciation. So it goes without saying that the vessel used to hold it is worthy of a fair amount of consideration.

Our favorite glasses for enjoying Champagne are, bar none, made by the Lehmann Glass company based in Reims. Pierre-Yves Legrand, export director for Lehmann, recently hosted a special event in Redwood City where our customers were able to test out this incredible line of mouth-blown glasses with some of our favorite Champagnes. What became apparent is that the different types and shapes of the glassware had varying degrees of suitability depending on the type of Champagne being consumed. Here are some of my observations from the event:

The Lehmann “Jamesse Prestige Synergie” (\$39.99) was perfect with Franck Bonville Blanc de Blancs. The wideness of the glass caused the delicate, creamy flavors to stretch and blossom with each sip. Despite its size, with an impressive capacity of 750 milliliters, it feels as light as a feather and has an effortless quality that matches the effortless power of the Grand Cru blanc de blancs.

With the Michel Arnould brut rosé, the Lehmann “A. Lallement” Champagne Mouth-Blown Wine Glass #4 (\$39.99) was ideal. With its narrower shape, it does a remarkable job of concentrating the powerful fruit flavors of the Grand Cru Pinot Noir of Verzenay.

The Lehmann “A. Lallement” Champagne Mouth-Blown Wine Glass #1 (\$39.99) offers the most versatility—the widening effect of the Synergie, but it narrows towards the mouth just enough to provide a concentrating effect as well. It can even be used for aromatic red wines such as Pinot Noir or Nebbiolo.

If you are searching for a glass that can be used universally with any Champagne, the Lehmann “Jamesse Prestige” Grand Champagne Mouth-Blown Wine Glass #45 (\$39.99) is beautiful and feels great in the hand, and follows the same contour as the more affordable Lehmann “Jamesse Reference” Grand Champagne Glass #41 (\$11.99).

They also make great gifts! (All prices are per glass; ship as 6-packs.)



A Summit of Quality: Billecart-Salmon

By Alex Schroeder

Every year the Champagne team at K&L gathers for our annual Champagne staff summit to open and try nearly 65 different Champagnes from well-known houses so we can help our customers better understand and choose the right bottle for that special occasion. This year, we opened the summit with a special sushi dinner with Geoffrey Loisel, export director for Billecart-Salmon.

This year marks the 200th anniversary of this important Champagne house in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, and thanks to recent improvements and additions to the production facility as well as the incredible talent of newly appointed head winemaker Florent Nys, their line of wines has never been better, and offers connoisseurs top-quality bubbles for any occasion. These are no-expense-spared, no-process-rushed wines made by great people, which is why they never cease to impress.

Billecart-Salmon “Brut Réserve” (\$44.99) is better than it has ever been. This is due in part to incorporating 40 new barrels into the production process, giving the wine a new level of texture and complexity, while preserving the brightness and purity of fruit it is so well known for. 95 DC, 91 WS

Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé (\$74.99) has been the house’s flagship wine since being reintroduced to the market after World War II. It has powerful strawberry, cherry and citrus fruit while remaining delicate, creamy and very well balanced. If you haven’t tried this customer favorite rosé, move it to the top of your list. 94 JS, 93 WS

2007 Billecart-Salmon Vintage Champagne (\$89.99) is a vintage wine worth dotting over. It is made from 75% Pinot Noir from Verzenay and Ambonnay, and 25% Chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs. It has beautiful cherry, citrus fruit with delicate toast, a creamy texture and the perfect balancing acidity. 94 DC, 94 JS

2006 Billecart-Salmon Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne (was \$174.99, now \$129.99) is the epitome of the style. 100% Grand Cru Chardonnay from Côte des Blancs, aged 11 years on the lees, it displays freshness, depth, concentration and focus all at once, with aromas of butterscotch, honeysuckle, lemon meringue and fresh apricots. Great weight, complexity and richness, with lift and delicacy.



Franck Bonville: Our Little Gem from Avize

By Scott Beckerley

If my memory serves correctly, this is our fifteenth year having the great pleasure to stock the wines of Franck Bonville. In late August of this year, all three stores hosted a comparative tasting of Champagne from the 2012 vintage. The wines of Franck Bonville were the favorites (number one was their Belles Voyes). These wines represent not only some of the best of the small-estate houses that we carry, but also are long-lived wines that are perfect for the cellar.

This past year, I have opened up a gorgeous vintage 1996 Brut Blanc de Blancs that I think I paid under thirty dollars for. To show you the extreme value of these wines, the current vintage **2012 Franck Bonville “Millesime” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne** is only **\$39.99**. That is less than a one-dollar-per-year increase in price. While my 1996 was just stellar and still had wonderful acidity, the 2012 vintage is no slouch. It has a lovely nose of ripe, white fruits and yellow apple, and a medium-to-full mid-palate that leads to the signature, awesome, green apple finish with crisp minerality, tart chalk and salinity. This is why these wines age so beautifully! I am super excited about a trio of new wines that are coming in for the first time from Olivier Bonville, the winemaker.



Olivier Bonville pulls out a barrel sample of 2017 Belles Voyes while Gary takes notes.

The **2012 Franck Bonville “Pur Avize” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne** (**\$64.99**) is one of these. I tasted this and the other “Pur” bubbly way back in late August of this year. Thank goodness for sample bottles! Of the three selections (including Pur Mesnil and Pur Oger), this one is the leesiest! A nose of cream and fresh cut pears. It lingers on the palate with tart orange and lemon-lime flavors. Quite linear, with a long, long finish, which seems to be the hallmark of this line. Superb!

The **2012 “Pur Mesnil” Brut Blanc de Blancs** (**\$64.99**) has a low dosage of 4 grams per liter that does not necessarily make for any teeth-chattering acidity! The honeysuckle and white stone fruit nose is very pretty. Hints of cream, Key lime and meringue. Super long finish! Very pretty texture and finesse. My personal favorite of the trio. Super limited and perfect for those Champagne geeks of you out there.



The third in this trio is a distinct little gem: **2012 “Pur Oger”** (**\$64.99**) smells richer than the Pur Mesnil but is actually more steely on the palate. Lemon curd and fresh lime are the main components and like its brethren, it has a long, lingering finish of chalk and minerals. Too special to miss out on!

Always popular and the super cellar selection, is the non-vintage **Franck Bonville “Belles Voyes” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne** (**750ml \$69.99; 1.5L \$149.00**), which is all 2012 and is actually labeled (on the front) with the vintage for the first time, ever. All of my older bottles of this have Post-its attached to them listing the vintage! These barrel-fermented and barrel-aged beauties are for collecting, aging and serving with a fine meal. **91 WS**

Two years ago, I opened up a 1998 that was so round and so rich, with such supple oak, that it could be mistaken for a Montrachet with bubbles! Shout out to Diana Turk on that one. She loved it, as well, and it was her first taste of aged Belles Voyes. She’s hooked now! I still have others at home, 1996, 2004, 2008(!) and (probably) more. I need to check on that.

In any case, the 2012 has been just great since its release. I have been to this vineyard a few times and it has a magnificent view. You can literally put your car in neutral and coast down the hill onto the flats of the Côte des Blancs. This is a tiny, 3,000 bottle production from a tiny (three-quarter acre) old vine plot. So, it’s best not to wait to buy this one. In fact, it is a good idea not to wait to buy *any* of the Franck Bonville wines because the total production is less than 13,000 bottles. The new trio will likely sell at lightning speed. Olivier and his staff put their heart and souls into these great Champagnes!



Bolly Holidays! Pop the Cork on a Stunning Bollinger

By Diana Turk

“Bollinger! If it’s ’69, you were expecting me.”

Champagne powerhouse Bollinger is known for a Pinot Noir-driven style. The wines are both classic and hip, and their sophisticated releases feel equally at home in a James Bond film (quoting 1979’s *Moonraker*, above) as they do at a holiday party.

The quality is apparent at the beginning of the range with the **Bollinger “Special Cuvée” Brut Champagne (\$59.99)**. Two-thirds of the fruit is estate-based, with some purchased Chardonnay from the celebrated Côte des Blancs. A full 15% of the reserves are aged on the lees in magnums for at least five years. The Special Cuvée displays an ethereal pillowy texture, with Bollinger’s rounded fruit profile and a sharper, but long finish. The satisfying backbone of acid hints at great aging potential, although this is a bottle you’ll most likely want to try immediately. **93 WS**

That’s a hallmark of all Bollinger wines: they age exceedingly well, as is true of the **2007 Bollinger “Grande Année” Brut Champagne (\$99.00)**. When I tasted this last year against the sumptuous 2005, it



sang with stone fruit but felt green. Bollinger’s vinous style was evident, just hidden beneath the freshness. The 2007 (70% lush Pinot Noir, 30% chalky Chardonnay) is still singing with great tension and the bright acid characteristic of the vintage, but shows a more honeyed nose, with apricot fruit through the palate and that coveted toasty hit to the finish. It’s aged—on cork!—for over nine years, and the leesiness is really starting to show. There’s enough structure for this heady beauty to live much longer, but it’s enjoyable now, and at a price point for elegant gift-giving. **94 RP**

Speaking of drinking well now, the non-vintage **Bollinger Brut Rosé (\$74.99)** is a food-pairing dream. It gets its color and rosé flavor from estate Pinot Noir from the Grand Cru village of Aÿ and shows wild strawberry fruit and a spicy herbaceousness up front. This is an expressive and elegant wine, whose vibrant personality mellows to a softer texture on the palate, with tiny bubbles and a beautiful (and oft-requested) salmon color in the glass. **94 JS, 93 RP**

The show-stopper of Bollinger’s current lineup is the **2004 Bollinger “R.D.” Extra Brut Champagne (\$229.00)**. The palate is rich, but racy acidity indicates that this stunner still has a long life ahead. **97 RP**

Join the Club!

By Heather Gowen

Champagne is for special occasions, but why not make more days special with our Champagne Club? Many of you have probably heard that we have wine clubs here at K&L, but did you know that we have a **Champagne Club**? Buyer Gary Westby curates the selections himself, and chooses wines both to broaden your bubbly palate, and to delight your wallet. As with our other clubs, these wines are specially priced for club members. This club ships every other month, and the price per shipment is \$69.95. Gary pulls wine from our extensive portfolio, bringing you bubbles from small grower-producers, single varietals, and lesser-known regions, as well as the Grand Marque houses.

With six shipments a year, the goal is to explore the world of Champagne. Each month has a theme, whether that be a grape, region, winemaking style, or even a contrast of those elements. Gary’s notes,

included in the club newsletter, delve into the details on the given month’s two wines. This is a great way for you to dive into the world of Champagne, learn the various styles and find what you love. It’s also a great gift for the aspiring connoisseur in your life.

Once you join a wine club at K&L, you have access to special pricing on wines from any other club, as well as past club selections. Not only can you enjoy an array of Champagnes at discounted prices, but you can look for our monthly email specials with deep discounts on wine and spirits specifically for club members. Specials can be anything from high-end Napa Valley Cabernet, to limited-run spirits, our favorite new weekday sippers, and of course, Champagne! For more details, or to sign up, please visit our web page at klwines.com/subscription.

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