

WINE News

Chill. Pop. Toast!



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Effervescently Yours, Champagne

By Gary Westby

The tremendous diversity in Champagne is one of the region's greatest strengths. In this newsletter, we celebrate the variety that it has to offer. Even the Grand Marque producers in these pages are located in the *vignoble*, rather than the cities of Champagne, tying them every day to the quality that is always first in any fine wine: the source; the vineyards. Scott takes a deep dive into the history of Laurent-Perrier and their finest wine, the Grand Siècle, on page two. Laurent-Perrier defiantly makes their top wine from three vintages instead of one, and it's all the better for it. The cellar at Laurent-Perrier is located under the vines of Tours-sur-Marne, right where the Grand Valley of the Marne meets the Mountain of Reims. On page three, Stephanie takes a look at the range

from Billecart-Salmon, whose cellars are under Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, but, as they will remind you, always *over Aÿ!* Here, the super-cold fermentations and careful selection of the cleanest fruit yield a range of wines fit for the most jaded of palates. On the same page, I will take you on a trip to the western edge of Champagne, where the Fallet family has been growing grapes since the 1600s, and more lately, giving us wines that have been aged as patiently as they have tilled the soils of Drachy. Finally, on the back page, we talk about the best way of all to get to know the diversity of the Champagne region—the K&L Champagne club, which “tours” the region every other month with a selection of bottles.

Baron-Fuenté “Grande Réserve” Brut Champagne (\$24.99) I have to stop being surprised by the quality of this, our least-expensive Champagne. All of the elements are there: three years of aging on the lees, and a full third of reserve wines, make this wine more expensive to make than many more famous names that we sell for twice as much. It has lovely baguette toast aromas, a round mid-palate, and a dry finish. Perfect for any occasion!
90 JS



Thierry Thibault Brut Champagne (\$29.99) Our yearly allocation direct from Thibault is here, but will not last long. Thierry is the son of Daniel Thibault, chef de cave at Charles Heidsieck for decades, and renowned as one of the greatest winemakers the region has ever known. The apple has not fallen far from the tree. This non-vintage wine, based on 2015, is composed of one-third each Chardonnay, Meunier, and Pinot Noir. It has a perfect bead and subtle brioche flavors that will satisfy the most sophisticated of Champagne lovers.



2006 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart” Brut Champagne (\$99.99) I was excited to recommend this tête de cuvée from Billecart at the old price of \$160, but at \$100 it is simply one of the best values in fine wine in the store. When I tasted this at last year's Champagne summit, I wrote “LUXURY” in all caps next to it. This elegant, fresh, long-finishing Champagne is as good as it gets. 97 RP, 97 VN, 96 DC



The Prince of Champagne and the Grand Siècle

By Scott Beckerley

As many of you already know, the great Champagne house of Laurent-Perrier was brought to its current status by Bernard de Nonancourt, legendary resistance fighter, war hero, and businessman known as the “Prince of Champagne” and “Le Grand Bernard.” There are few in the Champagne industry that match or eclipse his fame. He raided Adolf Hitler’s wine cellar in 1945, to discover half a million bottles, including hundreds of bottles of the classic 1928 Salon. He conceived of the beloved Grand Siècle cuvée in 1953, and launched their equally famous brut rosé in 1968. I had



Dominique DeMarville, then-cellar master at LP, from our meeting in March.

the extreme pleasure of being allowed into the cellar at Laurent-Perrier to see a chamber of original bottlings of Grand Siècle, continuing their decades-long slumber. Instead of basing his premium cuvée on a single vintage, which was *de rigueur* in the Champagne industry at the time, Bernard conceived of a cuvée from three of their top vintages, which is still done to this day. The original bottling, released in 1960, is composed of

the 1952, 1953, and 1955 vintages. He also researched the history of wine bottles, going as far back as 4,000 BC, before he settled on a seventeenth-century “swan neck” bottle, which is the unique and distinctive bottle that you see today. Bernard drew up a possible list of names for the new wine, which included “Grand Siècle” (literally, “great century,” it refers to a period of the seventeenth century when France was ruled by Louis XIII and Louis XIV). He then asked the advice of his friend and mentor Charles de Gaulle, who gave him his hearty approval of the name. Voila! A new premium cuvée is born. With the current Grand Siècle program, there are several choices, as opposed to the previous single bottling. Ever since its inception, Grand Siècle has been composed of 100% Grand Cru fruit.

First of all, there is the non-vintage Laurent-Perrier “Grand Siècle” **Iteration No. 24 (\$149.00)**. Composed of the 2004, 2006, and 2007 vintages, this is the twenty-fourth, and most current blend of Grand Siècle. Showing a nose of apricot, nougat, malt, and roasted nuts, the wine is silky-smooth and creamy, with a very small bead. There are notes of citrus and vanilla on the finish, which is detailed with very fine bubbles. This blend of 50% Chardonnay and 50% Pinot Noir is just super elegant. **97 JS, 96 WE**

Iteration No. 22 (1.5L \$325.99) Magnum only. This is one of my favorite wines, ever. I can’t praise this bottling enough. A blend of the 1999, 2002, and 2004 vintages, the wine has a fresh nose of crème de caramel, peach, oranges, and cream. There’s even more acidity in this bottling, with the addition of some saline and oyster shell notes at the back of the palate. And it also retains that signature Laurent-Perrier cream. A blend of 55% Chardonnay and 45% Pinot Noir, this has a lower dosage of 7 grams per liter. **98 JS**



Iteration No. 20 (1.5L \$299.99) Magnum only. Not to be overlooked, by any means, this excellent blend of the 1996, 1997, and 1999 vintages also has 55% Chardonnay and 45% Pinot Noir, and a lower dosage, this time at 8 grams per liter. Like the Iteration No. 24, toasted nuts on the nose, with citrus and baking spices, and, once again, those hints of cream and vanilla. This particular release of Grand Siècle comes off as spicier and more citrusy. I imagine that this is due to the inclusion of the renowned 1996 vintage. It makes the whole lineup even more interesting. **94 VN**

Laurent-Perrier “La Cuvée” Brut (187ml \$12.99; 375ml \$19.99; 750ml \$39.99; 1.5L \$79.99; 3L \$279.99) Let’s not forget the workhorse non-vintage brut. This “entry-level” beauty has only gone up in quality in recent years and has wonderful lemon meringue, peach, and stone fruit goodness. A bargain, as well! **93 JS**

Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Brut (750ml \$69.99; 1.5L \$149.99) The renowned non-vintage rosé is a powerhouse of dark strawberry and deep raspberry fruit; oranges, light citrus spice; and yes, there it is again, cream and nougat. This is a somewhat richer style of brut rosé that not only works well as an aperitif but, dare I say, can also hold up to a main course. **93 WS**

2004 Cuvée Alexandra Brut Rosé (\$299.00) For me, this is neck-in-neck with my beloved Iteration 22. Rose petals and orange marmalade on the nose, with cherry liqueur, candied oranges, and light baking spices on the palate. Just excellent! **96 VN**



Fallet-Dart: On the Western Frontier of Champagne

By Gary Westby

You have to drive an hour and a half to the west of Epernay to get to Drachy, one of the furthest-west villages in the Champagne region, and one of the closest to Paris. Here, Paul Fallet and his family have been growing grapes for at least 16 generations—more than 100 years longer than the United States has been a nation. This long history is inside every bottle. They are the most patient grower-producers that we work with, and age their wines longer on the lees than almost anyone in the Champagne region.

Their **Fallet-Dart “Grande Sélection” Brut Champagne (\$36.99)** is systematically aged for at least six years on the lees, but our current batch has been aged for eight years! It is composed of 70% Pinot Noir and 15% each of Chardonnay and Meunier, and has a generous brioche toast character, with a very fine bead of bubbles from the long contact with the lees in the bottle. This Champagne always tastes luxurious, but is priced within reach.

The **Fallet-Dart Brut Rosé Champagne (\$34.99)** is one of our staff’s very favorite Champagnes. It’s composed of 60% Meunier and 40% Pinot Noir that have been treated to a full maceration of all the skins



with all the juice for about 48 hours. This method, which is far less common in Champagne than the addition of a small amount of red wine, gives the wine a lot of savory cherry fruit. It’s incredibly refreshing and dry in style, and due to four years minimum on the lees, has great complexity and sourdough bread flavors and aromas to balance out the fruit.

The top-of-the-line wine here is already 16 years old. Based on the 2004 vintage, the **Fallet-Dart “Clos du Mont” Brut Champagne (\$79.99)** is an entirely barrel-fermented Champagne that comes from their best site, the Clos du Mont. It’s composed of 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir. This was the best Champagne from my March trip to the region, with perfect nougat cream giving depth to white truffle aromas, and a fresh, chalky finish that I can still taste if I close my eyes.

Don’t miss the wines of Fallet-Dart. Their patience has rewarded us with great Champagne.



Billecart-Salmon: You’ll Understand Why

By Stephanie Vidales

It’s no secret that K&L offers amazing wines that are directly imported from all over the world, with the Champagne category being no exception. In addition to these direct imports, there are larger Champagne producers that always deliver consistent and exceptional wines that are perfect for any holiday celebration. Since its inception in 1818, the great Champagne house Billecart-Salmon in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ has been family-run by seven generations. They continue to produce top-quality wine for casual drinking and serious collecting.

In 1964, the first vintage of Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart was created in homage to the house’s founder. The **2006 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart” Brut Champagne (\$99.99)** is an exceptional blend of 60%

Pinot Noir from Montagne de Reims and the Grande Vallée de la Marne, with 40% Chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs. With 10 years of lees aging, this powerful wine is masterfully balanced with



Mathieu Roland-Billecart pouring samples at the maison in Mareuil.

stone fruit, citrus, and honey notes. Consider laying this beauty down in your cellar, as it will become even more special with time.

The **2008 Billecart-Salmon Extra Brut Champagne (\$79.99)** is a real stunner. This is one of our favorite Champagnes from this great vintage because it is precise, yet powerful, and has great aging potential. Aromas of apples, citrus, fresh bread, and nuts jump out of the glass. Chalky minerality and acidity dominate the palate, along with white peach, roasted nuts, and citrus zest. **97 DC, 96 JS**

Billecart-Salmon “Brut Réserve” (\$44.99) This never disappoints. And, it’s the most affordable option in their lineup! It’s made up of 40% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, and 30% Pinot Noir from the best vineyards in the region. Aged 30 months on the lees, this blend includes over half reserve wines, creating a harmonious Champagne with true elegance. Stone fruit and apple flavors pair with light bread and floral notes on the palate. This wine is versatile enough for any occasion. **95 DC**

Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé Champagne (\$74.99) Lastly, we cannot forget the house’s flagship cuvée. This is one of the best-selling rosé Champagnes out there—and you’ll understand why, when you take the first sip. It has an inviting nose of citrus and red fruit that carry onto the palate, with a refreshing and creamy mouthfeel. **93 JS**





This map of the Champagne region, which K&L Champagne buyer Gary Westby bought at an auction in France, is from 1947. But, not much has changed!

Join the Club: K&L's Champagne Club Delivers the Bubbly and More!

By Gary Westby

Our K&L Champagne club makes an excellent year-round gift—especially when the gift is for you. Members receive two bottles every other month (six shipments totaling twelve bottles a year), which can be delivered or picked up at one of our stores. The price is fixed at \$69.95 per shipment, and you will always receive at least \$80 retail worth of Champagne. More than once this year, the total retail value was \$100 or more. The **club** seeks to take members on a tour of the Champagne region's styles, grape varieties, and sub-regional terroir. Each shipment comes with a newsletter explaining the two Champagnes and the people behind them, often with food pairing ideas, and always with pictures. If you love Champagne, or love somebody who loves Champagne, I am sure that you will be very satisfied with the selections.

This October, we go straight into the heart of the best terroir in Champagne with both a vintage and a rosé offering. Together, the production of vintage and rosé Champagne adds up to less than 10% of the region, which produces almost entirely brut non-vintage.



Damien Hugot Brut Rosé Champagne (\$39.99) Wine Club \$34.99.

This estate-grown rosé is 95% Grand Cru Chardonnay, getting its color and flavor from just 5% Meunier harvested from an over-50-year-old plot in the village of Chavot.

2014 Louis Brochet "Alain" Millesime Brut Champagne (\$39.99)

Wine Club \$34.99. This vintage Champagne is named after Louis' father, Alain, and is entirely from the Premier Cru of Ecuil on the mountain of Reims. The 2014 vintage is an old school classic whose long, cool, even growing season has produced streamlined wines like we have not seen since 1988 in the region.

Both of these wines are 100% grown and made by the man whose name is on the label.

Club members not only have the opportunity to buy more bottles of the Champagne at a discount, but also get access to club prices on wines from the **Best Buy, Premium, Signature Red, Italian, and French** clubs. Several times a year we also offer six-bottle packs of Champagne at an incredible discount. If you want to learn more about Champagne and enjoy great drinking while doing it, this is a great club to join.



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