



SPRING 2024

CHAMPAGNE CLUB



NEXTGEN CHAMPAGNE

The latest edition of the Caveau Champagne Club will soon be in your hands– a twice-yearly exploration of some of the most fascinating sparkling wines on earth – Grower Champagnes.

The wines in this 6-bottle shipment have been specifically selected to showcase some of the newer members of our portfolio, and in general, **the Next Generation**. You can use all of the bottles to stage your own tasting at home, or of course you can just drink the wines one by one. There are very few rules to follow in Champagne!



As always, you're receiving six different wines, chosen with the help of our winemakers, to showcase the diversity and complexity of this magnificent region.

This shipment explores two things:

- 1) What a new generation of winemakers is up to, and, as a subtopic,
- 2) Pure Pinot Noir Champagnes--two from the Aube and one from near Reims.

If you're new to the Club, or would like to brush up on how Champagne is made and what all those words on the labels mean (like *tirage* or *dosage*), you'll find our Champagne 101 tutorial on our website under "Champagne Club". Enjoy!

WE EXCLUSIVELY IMPORT GROWER CHAMPAGNE. AND THAT'S IMPORTANT.

Grower Champagnes are simply wines produced 100% from vineyards that are owned by the producer. It may surprise you to learn that over 88% of Champagne is Negociant Champagne – meaning that the wines are made with grapes purchased from dozens to hundreds of different growers from throughout the region, and produced in huge factories.

The big names that you are likely familiar with – Moët et Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Mumm, Taittinger, etc. – those are negociants. They produce millions of cases of wine, in an industrial fashion, from fruit grown mostly not by themselves, but by thousands of smaller growers across the 319 villages that make up the Champagne viticultural region.

Grower Champagnes, on the other hand, are made by small, family producers, growing grapes and making wines exclusively from their own vineyards. This is analogous to the small, family estates of Burgundy. The typical Grower Champagne producer makes fewer than 5,000 cases per year (in fact less than a dozen make more than 6,000 cases). There are over 7,500 of these small grower-producers in Champagne, but only about 300 of them are available here in the U.S.

It is fascinating driving around in Champagne. Every village has a billboard near the town crossroads that features the names of all the producers nearby. It is typical to read down those lists and not recognize a single name!



CHAMPAGNE J.M. GOULARD

Damien Goulard always seems a bit nervous in his tasting room, but those nerves quickly dissipate while in his vineyard. And so it went, on an oddly blistering hot, bald-spot sunburning day in June, that the relaxed version of Damien revealed himself.

Standing in the middle of one of his beautiful plots of Chardonnay, on the hillside of the Massif de St.-Thierry, it became abundantly clear that Damien prefers to be talking about viticulture, and specifically biodynamics.



On these topics, the staid, shy, doe-eyed Damien literally lights up. He effortlessly falls into a stump speech-style rant about all the things he loves about farming, organics, sustainable viticulture, and all that jazz. It was a clear reminder to us that farming isn't ONLY about what is best for the plants and the land, but also about what excites and animates the actual farmer.

Sitting across the table with a winemaker 20 different times over the course of 2 weeks forces one to pay attention to clues like these, little giveaways that speak to the mindset of what's going on with our partner wineries. It's not enough to just do wine talk. To understand what's going on we need to dig a few layers deeper. And sometimes those a-ha moments reveal themselves in obvious ways, like by taking the visit OUTSIDE!

With these two wines, from among Damien's wonderful lineup of Champagne, we think you will clearly see how his energy translates into the finished product -- a little quiet at first, but after 20 minutes, blossoming into something full-throated and complex.



DAMIEN GOULARD

ORIGINE BLANC DE NOIRS
EXTRA BRUT ~ \$39

LA SEREINE BRUT ~ \$39

Damien Goulard has 18.5 acres of vines spread over some 50 small parcels, all in the sub-region known as the Massif de Saint-Thierry - a high elevation site to the north and west of Reims. It's technically part of the Montagne de Reims, but is truly a terroir all its own. Viticulture on the Massif dates to the year 532, but the region has historically had a paucity of quality-oriented producers.

Cuvée Origine

- A young cuvée of Pinot Noir and Meunier
- Bottled with 5 grams dosage.
- Disgorged in May 2022
- Fresh cut flowers, ginger, citrus rind lead the way
- Base wine of 2020, with reserves from 2018-2019.
- A secondary thread of white mushrooms and brioche

La Sereine

- 40% Pinot Noir, 25% Meunier, and 35% Chardonnay from the 2018 harvest.
- Disgorged in March 2022 following 900 days of aging on the lees (as noted on the label)
- A 7 gram dosage at the time of disgorgement
- Fresh and lively
- A whiff of oyster shells and sea air
- With some time in the glass picks up honeyed aromas
- Light straw color (from the Pinot Noir)

CHAMPAGNE COESSENS

One cannot help but like Jérôme Coessens immediately. Anyone could be presumed to kick off an immediate man-crush. During a visit, we ask questions as passengers in the backseat of Jérôme's pickup, and instead of answering in motion, the truck is brought to a stop, he kills the engine, listens carefully, and gives a meaningful reply. Even though he looks the part, this is no brawny former rugbyman. Jérôme is a thoughtful, enthusiastic dude that knows his part of the Champagne landscape waaaaaaay better than many.

So well, in fact, that he has separated his vineyard into four distinct parcels, each of which yields an important element to his wines' finality. He breaks down this tasting chart like this—fruitiness, floweriness, mineral, and, matière—the latter loosely translated as stuffing. Anyone searching for a rubric of sorts for tasting and creating meaningful notes in Champagne might wish to become familiar with these words. Parsing Champagne into these four elements is super useful.



We'll be watching him closely over the coming years as well. Jérôme is now the proud new owner of 6ha (about 14 acres) in Les Riceys, a commune in the Aube that is the only one in all of Champagne able to make three different appellations--Champagne, Coteaux Champenois (still wine), and Rosé de Riceys. Riceys is a sort of bridge between Champagne and Burgundy, and we can't wait to see what abounds in the capable hands of a winemaker like Jérôme!

The range of wines at Coessens shows off all of the above with 5 different wines that are all single vineyard, single grape (Pinot Noir), and crafted by a single winemaker that refers to himself a "mono-maniac".



JÉRÔME COESSENS

BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT ~ \$69

Jérôme makes big, structured, hearty, and strong Champagne. And they are super easy to fall in love with. Sometimes we are forced to see the reflection of a winemaker's stature and personality in the wines they produce.

These wines have personality and their own style. They are the antithesis of the blended, lowest-common-denominator style of Champagnes. Jérôme's wines are all 100% Pinot Noir, and are conceived and approached as if they were Grand Cru Burgundy.

And while yes, Jérôme's wines can be considered a little brawny, the fact remains that we are still talking about Champagne, a beverage largely made by using under-ripe grapes, and considered to be, overall, delicate. Context is important here.

Blanc de Noirs Brut

- Pure Pinot Noir from the hillside monopole vineyard of L'Argillier
- A base wine from 2019 with about 30% reserves from 18 and 17
- powerful notes of nectarines and peaches on the palate
- Bottled in March 2020 and disgorged in May 2023
- 7 grams dosage
- A distinct, saline-inflected minerality on the finish

CHAMPAGNE FORGET-CHEMIN

Thierry Forget is a 50-something winemaker--animated, but also measured. There is a twinkle in his eye about what he's doing -- clearly very proud of his work -- and the results are in the glass. He brushes aside too much talk of terroir. Instead, he makes statements like this: "I make wine from 11 villages and 70 parcels and use all three grapes. We grow great grapes, but after that I am a winemaker and I make MY style."

This is truly refreshing, as sometimes keeping track of what grape grows on what soil, and creates what kind of profile, becomes a bit difficult to keep straight! Sure, Thierry is a farmer first, but in the end he is also winemaker, and a master blender. Like any top chef, he knows where great ingredients come from, but once in his winery "kitchen", he relies on his skill and experience to take it from there.



A parallel could be made while listening to him after visiting the nearby famous Cathedral at Reims. Even though this is a building that is 900 years old, some of the stained glass has been designed by modern artists. Hence it is possible to observe the nave from Chagall that was done in the 70's right next to another apse that was installed by the German artist Imi Knebel in the same era. Thierry even mentioned Chagall at one point during a recent tasting, suggesting that he likes the blue range, but when he blends he is also looking for the bright colors of Van Gogh.

In other words, Thierry Forget doesn't want to fill his gallery with the works of one artist. He wants a polychrome of styles.

His close collaboration with daughter Marie clearly make this point!



THIERRY & MARIE FORGET

CUVÉE MARIE FORGET
EXTRA BRUT ~ \$42

File this one in the "mind blown" department. We sat and listened as Thierry rattled off the names of Grand Cru vineyards like Verzenay and Mailly, and then iced the cake with Premier Cru sites like Ludes and Chagny.

All of these are Thierry's top 1er Cru and Grand Cru holdings on the Montagne de Reims, and blend together to create an incredibly complex and complete NV bottling.

Like most of his wines, it contains a lot of reserve wine from previous vintages - some 40% in this case. This new blend is from a base of 2020 with reserves from 2016-2019 to round it out.

Cuvée Marie Forget

- 65% Pinot Noir and 35% Chardonnay
- A base wine from 2020 with about 30% reserves from 2016-19
- A fine copper hue from the Pinot Noir
- Bottled in March 2020 and disgorged in May 2023
- A 5 gram Dosage, but still lively, zippy and fresh
- Aromas of tangerine, cardamom, and white pepper carry through to a palate loaded with buttery brioche

CHAMPAGNE C.H. PICONNET

Visiting our growing stable of wineries in the Aube (Brigandat, Coessens, Couche, Sandrin, and now Piconnet), comes with a real bonus treat. A meal, or sometimes two, can be taken at the fantastic Le Garde Champêtre in Gyé-sur-Seine. It is hands down THE restaurant address in the area, and well-known among all our winemakers.

Late last year we were there three times (sometimes you gotta be greedy) over the course of the week, and on each visit started the meal with the restaurant's house Champagne--a Blanc de Noirs from the Aube's new young power couple--Clément and Agathe Piconnet. You may recall that we introduced you to their work last year, and you enthusiastically responded by clearing us out of our first delivery.



Conspicuously missing from that first offer though was the Blanc de Noirs mentioned above. It seems the folks at Le Garde Champêtre were living up to their name (the 'village policeman' in English), and taking nearly all of the Piconnet's Blanc de Noirs for themselves. When we asked for a small reservation, Clément cheekily pointed us back to the restaurant.

However, this year we got there first. The Piconnet's just finished a disgorgement in late January, and we managed to bump into them showing it off at a Champagne Printemps event in Reims. Then, a visit in person at the winery two days later yielded us an allocation.,

We'll leave the rest for the village policeman.



CLÉMENT & AGATHE PICONNET

BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT
NATURE ~ \$59

This is the one. Glorious Aube Pinot Noir, handcrafted in a ridiculously small batch, and mostly consumed by the locals. It is everything we look for when we add wines to our portfolio. And in the glass, it is everything we look for there too! A slight coppery color leads to a brioche-scented, ripe golden apple number, and is balanced with a mouthwatering salinity and freshness. No wonder it's a restaurant's wine by the glass.

A newbie, based on the 2020 vintage and culled from three parcels around Neuville--La Source, La Lampe and Les Val Cureux. Disgorged in January 2023 and bottled with no dosage--a truly beautiful example of Brut Nature Pinot Noir Champagne.

Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature

- Pure Pinot Noir from the hillsides surrounding Neuville-sur-Seine
- A base wine from 2020 with about 20% reserves from 19 and 18
- Like all Piconnet wines, exuberant, lively, and complex
- Bottled in March 2021 and disgorged in November 2023
- Zero Dosage
- Ready for a plate of oysters, a ripe stinky cheese, or pizza night!

CHAMPAGNE LACOURTE-GODBILLON

Géraldine Lacourte's grandparents on both sides were grape growers, having started their vineyards in the late 40's following the end of WWII. Both families, at the time called Lacourte-Labasse and Godbillon-Marie, sold bulk wines to customers to directly take home in their cars. And then in 1968, the two families unified by marriage, Géraldine's parents founded Lacourte-Godbillon and bottled just a few thousand bottles a year, while selling the rest of their fruit to the local cooperative.



Forty years later, along with her husband Richard Desvignes, Géraldine quit her executive job and returned to the country to take the next step on a multi-generational ladder.

That step, almost from the beginning, required digging a 16 meter deep hole on a piece of land next to their old house where today, unknown to the visitor when arriving, is 3 levels deep and filled with one of the finest and neatest wineries we have ever seen. From the press pad and cuverie, down one level to the barrel storage, and finally to the very bottom for the bottled wine storage, this is the place that Géraldine's grandparents probably never imagined. The concrete structure, sort of like a giant underground parking garage, and finished in 2014, is neat, clean, and perfect.

Lacourte-Godbillon will be an incredible source of vinothèque bottles in the coming years, but for today, provides a remarkable window into the glories of Écueil, a little slice of heaven in the heart of the Petite Montagne de Reims.

GÉRALDINE LACOURTE & RICHARD DESVIGNES

TERROIRS D'ECUEIL EXTRA BRUT
~ \$55



We made our first purchase from Géraldine and Richard in 2022, and their wines immediately struck a chord. We've been taking calls and emails ever since for more of these limited and delicious gems. So when we visited with them again this past June, we managed to secure another small batch of their welcome mat bottling--Terroirs d'Ecueil, exclusively for our club members.

Géraldine likes to use a lot of reserve wines from older vintages to add complexity - in this case reserve wines from a multi-vintage solera (started in 2015) to make up almost 2/3 of the blend.

Terroirs d'Ecueil Extra Brut

- Pure Pinot Noir from the Petit Montagne de Reims subzoon of Ecueil
- A light copper color and the fine green tea, apple and faint thyme aromas.
- Blended from 85% Pinot Noir and 15% Chardonnay, and based on the 2019 harvest
- Bottled in February 2020 from a base of 2019 with nearly 2/3 of reserve wines from solera
- Dosage is a judicious 5 grams
- As beautifully built as any Champagne we sell, a perfect apéritif, or to drink through ANY meal

THE LAST DROP

Thanks for joining us on our exploration of the great wines of Champagne! Watch your email for information on our next Caveau Champagne Club shipment coming in spring 2024, and for pre-arrival offerings on all the yummy Bubblicies and Burgundies headed your way throughout the year. All the latest information is always available on our website: www.CaveauSelections.com

Have a desire to travel in Champagne and Burgundy sometime? Drop us a line if your interested! orders@caveauselections.com