

WINE News

Best Buys from Our Unparalleled Champagne Program



FEBRUARY 6, 2023 FEATURES

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Finding the Best Champagne For You Is Our Passion

By Gary Westby, Champagne Buyer



I would like to start this newsletter by saying thank you to our Champagne-loving customers. We always keep you in mind when looking for the best that the appellation has to offer, and we take your budget seriously.

Over the last year the benefit of our direct relationship with producers has proven to be a big contrast to the “price positioning” of the nationally distributed brands. While many of these companies are obsessed with *not* having a low price in the market, K&L is obsessed

with providing you the best Champagne for your hard-earned dollar. Luckily, that dollar is still strong against the euro, and we have access to some great growers, conscientious cooperatives, and high-quality small negociants. We bypass the markups of the import companies and distributors and have been able to keep our prices almost entirely stable.

In this issue, you’ll discover three of my favorite buys on this page. Scott Beckerley in San Francisco follows on page 2 with the incredible Aÿ Grand Cru-powered wines of Egrot. Michael Benoit in Redwood City is on page 3 with Le Brun de Neuville’s long-aged superstars. On page 4, I’ll talk about Fallet-Dart, one of the oldest growers in all of Champagne. We hope you enjoy these selections as much as we do!

Gary’s Top Must-Try Picks



Baron-Fuenté “Grande Réserve” Brut Champagne
\$24.99 (750ml) \$49.99 (1.5L)
 You must taste it to believe it. With 40% reserve wines, three years of ageing on the lees for the 750ml, and more than four for the magnum, this wine punches above its weight. Composed entirely of estate-grown or grapes purchased on

the vine, this 60% Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, and 10% Pinot Noir Champagne has lovely toast, a fine bead, and a long, dry finish.



Damien Hugot “Hommage 1921” Extra Brut Champagne
\$39.99 If you are interested in the post-modern “cult” Champagne style, but don’t feel like spending big money, pls a week searching for an allocation, this is your bottle. Very much in the style of Egly-Ouriet or Tarlant, with 50% large oak fermented Chardonnay from

Monthelon and a 50% field blend of Pinot Noir and Meunier from a stainless steel solera. Briny, ethereal, and complex!



Gilbert Jacquesson “Cuvée Prestige” Brut Champagne
\$34.99 (Previously \$45) We knocked \$10 off the price of this long-aged Champagne from Troissy in the Marne Valley since we last had it. 30% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir from 2013, and 40% barrel-aged Meunier from 2012. With more than eight years on the lees,

this brioche-filled, spicy, complex cuvée has fabulous richness, an ultra-fine bead, and a finish longer than most \$100 bottles.

Elisabeth Egrot's Mastery of the Grand Cru Terroir in Aÿ

By Scott Beckerley, San Francisco Champagne Specialist



When visiting Champagne, a stop in the Grand Cru of Aÿ is a must. Home to such houses as Bollinger, Ayala, and Deutz, the famous names are well represented here. This village sits right on the Marne, facing dead south, with the chalkiest soil for Pinot Noir in the whole Champagne region.

It is also home to one of the best families of growers, the Goutorbe clan, who not only make wine but are also responsible for a huge amount of the vine nursery work in Champagne. We have been working with Elisabeth Egrot (née Elisabeth Goutorbe) for a decade now, and she and her husband Jean-Marie Egrot have been delighting our customers with wines of class and power—all at great prices—for the entire time. If you haven't already, I strongly recommend that you discover the magic of this village. And I can't think of a better place to start than the incredible, well-priced wines of Elisabeth Egrot.



The brut non-vintage of this range is not to be missed. The **Egrot (Elisabeth Goutorbe) Brut Champagne \$34.99** is composed of a majority of Aÿ Grand Cru fruit with a little from the villages of Louvois, Mutigny, and Tauxierres in the blend. This Champagne combines an ease of drinking with subtle, but very deep chalky minerality, and Pinot Noir

savor. Composed of two-thirds Pinot Noir and one-third Chardonnay, it makes for an excellent aperitif.

For customers who love a bone-dry style, the **Egrot (Elisabeth Goutorbe) Extra Brut Champagne \$39.99** is hard to beat. The composition of grapes is the same as the wine above, two-thirds Pinot and one-third Chardonnay, but this wine is aged for a tremendous



Elisabeth and Jean-Marie Egrot

12 years on the lees—it is based on 2010 with reserves from 2009 and 2008! Elisabeth and Jean-Marie used only Aÿ Grand Cru and Mutigny 1er Cru in the blend, and the power of fruit from those villages has marked this wine with racy red cherry savor and gorgeous white flower aromas to balance out the considerable toasty character from all that time on the lees. While this wine is dosed at 2g/l, making it solidly an extra brut, it shows drier than many zero-gram wines on the shelf. I think this is because of those powerful 2008 reserve wines. This is a great partner for cracked crab, scallops, or other shellfish!

The pure Aÿ Grand Cru class of the **2011 Egrot (formerly Elisabeth Goutorbe) Grand Cru Brut Champagne \$39.99** is evident from the moment you first smell it. This cold vintage in Champagne was excellent on the steep, south-facing slopes of this village, and the wine is generous in fresh baguette toast, framed by bright Pinot Noir savor. The concentration given by the mid-slope sites is balanced by the cool nature of the harvest, and the wine is incredibly long and driven. The finish is like a kaleidoscope. Get it while it is still around!



Introducing Hollywood's New Champagne Specialist, Philip Roufail



For those of you looking for a great Champagne recommendation on in our Hollywood store, please meet the newest member of our Champagne team, Philip Roufail!

Here is an introduction in his own words:

My father was a doctor and had a passion for Champagne. When I was

growing up and not feeling well, he would write "Champagne" on his prescription pad and give it to me.

The staff members at our local wine store, the Golden Apple, were amused but did not think it was a good idea to prescribe Champagne to a teenager, even if I was the son of their best customer.

I love being in the Champagne section at K&L because it reminds me of him, celebrating good times, and my favorite movie quote: "The man who says 'no' to Champagne says 'no' to life." —from *The Deer Hunter*

Strength in Numbers: Le Brun de Neuville Champagne Cooperative

By Michael Benoit, Redwood City Champagne Specialist

One of our greatest strengths at K&L is our outstanding portfolio of direct import producers, and nowhere is that strength more apparent than in the Champagne aisle. One incredible producer whose wines we are proud to carry is Le Brun de Neuville, a cooperative in the village of Bethon, in the Côte de Sézanne. Located in one of the warmest and earliest ripening areas of Champagne, the wines from this estate are deliciously fruity. Yet, the prevalence of chalk in the soils here also gives the wines a keen mineral edge and a finish that goes on for days. While Le Brun de Neuville clearly focuses on Chardonnay—to be expected given that Chardonnay makes up 77% of vineyard plantings in the Côte de Sézanne—they do some amazing work with Pinot Noir as well.



Customers approach us every day about **Le Brun de Neuville “La Croisée des Chemins” Extra Brut Champagne \$39.99 94JS 93WE** with one question: how do I open this bottle? It’s really quite simple: a dull knife or a small screwdriver will easily pry off the agrafe, and, from there, the cork comes out as usual. Le Brun de Neuville secures the cork in this old-fashioned way to bring attention to the fact that this is the second cork the bottle has had. This single-vineyard Champagne, composed of 75% Chardonnay and 25% Pinot Noir, is aged on its lees in bottle for five years. It has an exquisite nose of almonds and white flowers with a superbly silky texture and loads of rich toasty flavors. A perfect apéritif, it finishes with beautiful, lingering chalk.

Le Brun de Neuville “Côte Blanche” Brut Champagne \$49.99 93JS is a tremendous value for a stunning bottle of Blanc de Blancs. Blended from different crus across the Côte de Sézanne, this Champagne leaps from the glass with Granny Smith apple, Bosc pear, and melon aromas. On the palate, a variety of orchard fruit notes continue with good concentration, bright zippy acidity, a touch of toast,



Damien Champy, the CEO of Le Brun de Neuville.

and a delightful, chalky finish. This classic Blanc de Blancs pairs perfectly with fresh, briny oysters or a bit of Comté cheese.

We are incredibly fortunate to have two different millésime bottlings from Le Brun de Neuville in stock and they are both stunning. The **2008 Le Brun de Neuville “Grand Vintage” Brut Champagne \$49.99 94WE** is from an exceptional year, and does it ever deliver!

It has a wonderfully velvety texture and is perfumed with lovely poached pear and brioche aromas that will draw you in as soon as you pop the cork. On the palate it balances yeasty, toasted brioche notes with Pippin apple and pure chalk minerality. While it is drinking wonderfully today, this bottle has the staying power for a long sleep in your cellar.



Presenting a more exotic impression, the **2012 Le Brun de Neuville “Grand Vintage” Brut Champagne \$49.99 93JS** has a nose packed with kiwifruit, lime zest, and jasmine blossom, with a bracing hit of acid on the first sip. Blending 97.5% Chardonnay with 2.5% Pinot Noir, this bottle marries racy acidity and crispness with mouth-filling flavors of Meyer lemon and quince, accented with a hint of crème fraîche. The subtle toast and Chablis-like minerality would make an excellent pairing with caviar served on toast points.



Rounding out this amazing collection is the **Le Brun de Neuville “Autolyse Noirs et Blancs” Brut Champagne \$59.99 94JS**, a simply fantastic bottle and my favorite of their offerings. Composed of 86% Pinot Noir and 14% Chardonnay, it shows the incredible depth and complexity that can only come from long aging on the lees. After more than 11 years of aging on the lees, the nose is full of nutty and earthy aromas: toasted almonds, crushed hazelnuts, and sautéed chanterelle mushrooms. This rich impression continues on the palate with flavors of mandarin orange and ripe apple intermingling with buttered sourdough toast. This opulent sensory experience is balanced by a razor-sharp acidity that cuts through the richness, leaving a lengthy finish of fresh lemon curd. An absolute stunner of a bottle at well under \$100, it would be a dream for brunch with an omelette aux champignons, but I’d enjoy this Champagne paired with almost anything.



The Champagnes of Le Brun de Neuville all have something to offer and are all a real bargain. Hopefully you’ll try at least one of these long-aged and well-priced bottles. If you’re anything like me, you’ll have trouble knowing where to start—but with Champagne this good, no matter which bottle you pick up I’m confident you’ll be back for another. Cheers!

Deep History in Drachy: The Champagne of Fallet-Dart

By Gary Westby, Champagne Buyer



Paul Fallet in the vineyard at Clos du Mont

For almost 500 years, the Fallet family has been growing grapes in Drachy, on the western edge of Champagne. Due to this incredible, long history, they are one of the most patient producers we work with. In fact, our oldest current-release Champagne is made by them, the Clos du Mont, which to date is 100% comprised of wine from the 2004 vintage, making it nearly 20 years old! They are blessed with great terroir, including the clos above, and work with a total of 47 acres. This allows them to make nearly 200,000 bottles a year,

a great volume for a grower-producer, but still tiny compared with the big-name brands. We buy the wines from Paul and Adrienne Fallet, the current generation, ensuring that we get you the best possible prices and the wines are stewarded exclusively in refrigerated containers. Paul takes care of the vineyards, Adrienne takes care of the cellar—they make a fantastic team. Many of you have met Paul at past tent tastings as well as Isabelle, who oversees exports.



Fallet-Dart “Cuvée de Réserve” Brut Champagne \$32.99 is composed of 70% Meunier and 30% Pinot Noir; the current batch is based on 2016. I love the savory gingerbread toast aromas and the crisp pear of the mid-palate. With more than four years of ageing on the lees, this wine has the tiny bubbles that one expects in more expensive bottles, and a great finish of pastry dough and spice that crescendos to a crisp, dry snap.

One of my favorites is the long-aged **Fallet-Dart “Grande Sélection” Brut Champagne \$34.99 (750ml) \$18.99 (375ml) \$74.99 (1.5L)**, which is treated to a full seven years on the lees in 750ml and even longer in magnum. 70% Pinot Noir, 15% Chardonnay, and 15% Meunier. It is an incredibly elegant drink at any price, but incomparable at \$34.99. This has complexity and savor, but I love it for its gentle baguette toast and superfine stream of bubble from the long aging. This is a bottle that gets better as it evolves—plan on having a second glass!



Almost always the first of their wines to sell out, the **Fallet-Dart Brut Rosé Champagne \$34.99** is a blend 60% Meunier and 40% Pinot Noir that is macerated for about 48 hours with all of its skins, with four years of aging on the lees. The first thing one notices aromatically is sourdough toast, but it is framed by wild red fruit from the skin contact. In the mouth it has great presence and richness, but it does not go over to heaviness like so many other grower saignée-style rosés can. The contrast between the fruit in the middle and the dry finish is what keeps the Champagne lover coming back for more!



A secret in the range is the **Fallet-Dart “Heres” Brut Champagne \$39.99**, a late disgorged “Grande Sélection” based on 2014. The label says “tirage 2015” which means it was bottled in 2015—a little confusing for us Californians used to vintage dates rather than bottling ones! This offering is dosed about one-third less than the regular Grande Sélection and is a fantastic partner for sushi—with all the complexity of the regular bottling but more limey drive and lift.

We only received a 60-bottle allocation of the **2015 Fallet-Dart Brut Champagne \$44.99**, which is composed of 70% Chardonnay and 30% Pinot Noir. It will be gone quickly. As I mentioned, the **Fallet-Dart “Clos du Mont” Brut Champagne (2004) \$79.99** is our oldest current-release Champagne, and comes from one of the very rare, walled vineyards of the region. Sadly, three of the four walls were destroyed in World War I, but it is still a clos—100 years is a blink of an eye in Drachy! This is 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir and one of the most complex, deep, and truffle-filled bottles in the store. Entirely barrel fermented, this is a giant slayer that can stand up next to the best wines in the world. This is our last drop of this great wine.



The **Fallet-Dart “Eocene” Extra Brut Champagne \$59.99** and the **Fallet-Dart “Quercus” Brut Champagne \$64.99** are both early releases of the Clos du Mont, still barrel fermented and 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir. The Eocene is tirage (or bottling) 2010 and 100% from the 2009 vintage, while the Quercus is tirage (or bottling) 2007 and all 2006. We only received five cases of each!

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