

WINE News

Venture boldly into the New Year — with a good bottle of Champagne!



NOVEMBER 22, 2021 FEATURES

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The Outlook is Sparkling

By Gary Westby

As many of our Champagne-loving customers have surely noticed by now, the Champagne market is currently seeing a lot of shortages and price increases. Never fear! The bottles are here in these pages of *Wine News*! With our more than 20-year history of direct importation, and our long-standing relationships with some of the top big houses, we not only have the wines for you, but we still have the great deals that have made us a welcome destination for lovers of Champagne. On page 2 of this newsletter, Alex from our Redwood City store talks about

Champagne Franck Bonville, our Grand Cru Chardonnay superstar. Fifty dollars spent with Bonville is better than \$100 almost anywhere else! Gio, from Hollywood, has more than one great prestige cuvée deal for you from customer favorite, Billecart-Salmon, on page 3. Then, on page 4, Scott from San Francisco goes over the great lineup from Baron-Fuenté, including the long-aged super-value Esprit. Please also check out my three picks below, as well as my little feature on our tiniest grower-producer, Alex Le Brun, on the last page. A toast to you!

Gilbert Jacquesson “Cuvée Tradition” Blanc de Noirs Brut Champagne

(\$24.99) Great grower Champagne at this price? Yes! This 100% Meunier comes from an almost one-man show in the heart of the Marne Valley. With more than three years on the lees and 50% reserves, this has the kind of quality that you would never expect at \$25. The Champagne has generous pastry crust and spiced pear flavors as well as a dry, sophisticated finish.



Louis Brochet 1er Cru Brut Champagne

(\$29.99) This estate-grown Champagne is composed of 70% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay, and 10% Meunier from Écueil on the Mountain of Reims. This has baguette toast, precise Pinot Noir red fruit, and the kind of refreshing, mineral-driven finish that you would expect from top Premier Cru grower Champagne. The 50% reserve wines in the blend are mostly sourced from a perpetual blend, adding more depth.



Damien Hugot Grand Cru Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne

(\$34.99) This all-Grand Cru Chardonnay hails from old estate vines in some of the most expensive land in Champagne—the hills of Chouilly and Cramant—but our direct buy keeps the price fair. I love the rich Meursault-like style of this wine, which has big brioche aromas and subtle white fruit, all leading up to a definitive, refreshing, chalky finish that goes on forever.





Pur Value in Avize: Champagne Franck Bonville

By Alex Schroeder

Champagne Frank Bonville has been a staple in our Champagne portfolio through many a holiday season. The distinct, elegant white label has a cult following among our longtime customers, and when you discover what exactly is in the bottle, it becomes clear why our allocations run out so quickly. Rarely do we see such an explosive combination of intense passion, generations of expertise, and some of the best Grand Cru Chardonnay terroir in the world.

The southeastern-facing slopes of the Côtes de Blancs contain some of the purest and deepest chalk deposits in Champagne, and also help to protect early buds from bouts of frost. The terroir produces balanced, nuanced, and expressive Chardonnay, and this is why most of the villages on its slopes are classified Grand Cru, making theirs some of the most expensive vineyards in the world. As such, some of the most expensive wines in the world come from this area: Salon, and Krug's Clos du Mesnil, for example.

Olivier is the fourth generation of Bonvilles to work the Côtes de Blancs. His great-grandfather Alfred shrewdly bought numerous plots right after phylloxera devastated French vineyards in the late 19th century. His grandfather Franck started making Champagne under his own name after the winery was liberated in World War II. Olivier joined his father Gilles at the winery in 1996 after earning the National Diploma of Oenology in Reims. He instituted biodynamic and environmentally sustainable farming practices and helped bring the winery up to modern standards.

Today, the Bonville line offers unmatched value in the Grand Cru Champagne category. The **Franck Bonville Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs (\$34.99)** is as delicious as its price is unbelievable. Sourced from vineyards across Mesnil, Oger, and Avize, it is made from

entirely Grand Cru Chardonnay and blended of 50% reserve wines, giving it great depth and complexity to balance out the minerals and creamy texture. It is the perfect Champagne to “case-up” on and always have waiting in the fridge for company.

The **Franck Bonville “Prestige” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne (\$44.99)** Prestige Cuvée is a small step up in price for a big step up in quality. Sourced from their oldest vineyards in Avize and aged at least five years on the lees, this Champagne is always a combination of two complementary vintages: one warmer and generously fruited, and one colder and more acid-driven.

The result is intensely concentrated aromas of Meyer lemon, nectarine, jasmine, hazelnuts, and minerals across a lifted, effortless texture, and a long, searing finish. This is non-vintage Grand Cru blanc de blancs at its best.

One of our most popular prestige cuvées is actually a vintage Champagne in disguise. The **Franck Bonville “Belles Voyes” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne (\$69.99)** is made from a small, 1.75-acre vineyard in Oger, and entirely from the 2013 vintage. It's barrel-fermented and aged over six years on the lees. The concentration of fruit and complexity of toasty lees and barrel characters are deftly

matched by vibrant minerals and perfectly honed acidity. This is one of our best-kept secrets, a prestige vintage Champagne for the amazing price of only \$69.99 — so treat yourself to one while they are still around!



Champagne collectors rejoiced at the last release of the Pur line of single-vintage, village-specific blanc de blancs, which harnesses the same concept as powerhouse Salon in Mesnil, but goes a step further to offer three different village representations in a single vintage: Oger, Avize, and Mesnil. Enthusiasts can taste the nuances of the three historic wine villages side-by-side, or enjoy each one on its own. They are exceptional. Our allocation of the 2014 vintage is extremely small, so if they are still in stock as you read this, do not hesitate to reserve yours. They will disappear quickly.

The deep topsoils of Avize lend the **2014 “Pur Avize” (\$64.99)** a generous, round fruit profile that complements its savory yeast perfectly. **2014 “Pur Mesnil” (\$64.99)** pairs its linear acid line with the bracing minerals of the chalky terroir. On the map, **2014 “Pur Oger” (\$64.99)** sits between the two, and in the bottle, offers an intriguing balance between a weighted fruity texture and airy, salty minerality. Tasting the three side-by-side is a humbling reminder of how just a few hundred meters of distance can completely alter the character of a wine in a given vintage.

So, whether you’re searching for an inexpensive house Champagne, looking for that special-occasion wine, or nerding out on the most historically and geologically rich wine region in the world, Champagne Franck Bonville has the perfect bottle to suit each need—and always at a price that far exceeds your expectations. Next time you’re shopping for bubbles, remember Bonville!



Olivier Bonville talks cooperage with the K&L team at Champagne Franck Bonville.

Friends of the Family: Champagne Billecart-Salmon

By Giovanni Buono



Mathieu Roland-Billecart pops corks for the delegation from K&L in July.

more important building relationships is than being in every 3-star restaurant. The family has managed to build an international reputation without the flash and glitz associated with some of the other houses. They did it by making complex, elegant wines that balance depth and tension seamlessly. And they do it intuitively: Mathieu says, “It’s not about the numbers, it’s about the taste.”

Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut Champagne (\$79.99). This chiseled, lacy and energetic expression of pure Chardonnay comes from the Côte des Blancs. It pulses with

We’ve been working with the Billecart’s wines since the very beginning of K&L. They were featured in our first newsletter in 1978, and they were also the first stop on our team’s trip back to France in July as soon as travel restrictions were lifted. The current (and seventh) generation at the helm is Mathieu Billecart, who expressed to us how much



beautifully balanced acid and airy notes of lemon zest, bitter almond, and a long, delicate finish. The warmed brioche character comes out as you swirl the wine, and quickly transforms from a cool palate’s embrace to a warm hug in a glass. Don’t forget the caviar! **93 WE**

Billecart-Salmon “Sous Bois” Brut Champagne (\$79.99) This throwback to Champagne history is vinified entirely in large, neutral 15-year-old oak barrels at low temperatures. Composed of all three of the Champagne grapes, this wine has a distinguished, polished feel. Dried fruit and spicy oak meld with ripe pear skin, a touch of lemon, and a whisper of white peach to give a wine that will knock the stuffing out of any poultry dish. **94 JS, 94 WS**

2007 Billecart-Salmon “Cuvée Louis” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne (\$129.99)

An homage to Elizabeth Salmon’s brother, Louis, who was the estate’s first oenologist, this is made with the very best Grand Cru fruit, 50% vinified in oak, and lingers 10 years on lees. This wine is like an amalgamation of the previous two, but maximized in a harmonious crush of oyster shell, hints of chalk, buttery croissant, delicate white flowers, exuberant citrus fruit, and a finish that haunts the palate for some time. You’ll thank yourself if you drink some now, but also lay some down for later. **95 RP, 95 WE**



A Favorite Returns for the Holiday Season

By Scott Beckerley

Well, here we are, with spring and summer already come and gone! Whereas these seasons seemed to drag on in 2020, they seemed to go by like lightning in 2021. On the plus side, a *big plus*, some of our favorite small-estate producers are returning this year. So far, we have seen the return of Launois, Franck Bonville, Damien Hugot, Trudon, Le Gallais, and others. And keep your eyes peeled for more arrivals. A shipment from one of our most highly regarded small estates, Baron-Fuenté, has just come in!

Champagne Baron-Fuenté

Baron-Fuenté offers wines that are less traditional in their blending. Their non-vintage entry-level **Baron-Fuenté “Grande Réserve” Brut Champagne** (375ml \$14.99; 750ml \$24.99; 1.5L \$59.99) is a whopping 60% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, and 10% Pinot Noir. A nose of flowers and bread dough, followed by a palate of round apples, stone fruits, cream, and ginger. I always have a mag a home for impromptu dinners.

The nonvintage **Baron-Fuenté “Esprit” Blanc de Blancs Brut Champagne** (\$34.99) is a lesson in chalky creaminess with a rich mid-palate, clean clay, toasted nuts, and lemon cream. Delicious!



Eric de Brissis of Baron-Fuenté demonstrates the excellent food pairing ability of the Blanc de Blancs.

The “sister” wine of the Blanc de Blancs is the **Baron-Fuenté “Esprit” Brut** (\$34.99). It is more classic, in both the blend and the flavors. Like the Aspasia vintage brut, it is a third each of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier. Rich, toasty, and ripe, with apple and lemon pie flavors. Caramel and hazelnut flavors are also there, with a surprisingly zippy mineral finish.

Normally, I am not a fan of sweeter bubbles of any type. The words “demi-sec” tend to scare me. However, in this instance, there is nothing scary about the **Baron-Fuenté Demi Sec** (\$24.99) with its floral character. It’s a blend of 60% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay, and 10% Pinot Noir, just like the Brut Reserve. It has 35 grams of sugar, but it does not taste too sweet or cloying. Candied apricot, fresh and juicy peaches, and cream dominate. Consider mixing it in your favorite Champagne cocktail!

Cheers to you!



Micro-Production Genius: Alex Le Brun

By Gary Westby



Yankee go home: Alexander Le Brun wears the colors, whenever San Francisco Bay Area-based K&L comes to call, in his cellar in Monthelon.

Alexandre Le Brun is the smallest of all our Direct Import Champagne producers. He only has 7.5 acres of vines, and he only keeps about one-third of the grapes, selling the rest. This allows him to be the most hands-on producer we work with—he does it all, from the pruning to the racking, the barrel rolling to the disgorgement. His wines, which use a large proportion of old, large wood, are among the best we carry. Sadly, there is only a little to offer!

Alexandre Le Brun “Tradition” Brut Champagne (\$34.99) This is Le Brun’s only wine that he makes from more than one press load, and is a combination of fruit from his tiny plots in Cramant, sud-Épernay, and the Côte de Sézanne. It is composed of a third each Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Meunier, and is toasty, balanced, and has amazing complexity for the price, but remains super easy to drink as an aperitif.

2014 Alexandre Le Brun “Fascination” Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne (\$69.99) Coming from two rows of the “derrière mont aigu” in the Grand Cru of Cramant, this wine is entirely fermented in old wood. One of the best blanc de blancs we have, this shows scintillating purity of Meyer lemon fruit, delicate brioche, and a near-endless finish.



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