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# MONOPARCEL CHAMPAGNE NARROW- OR SINGLE-MINDED?

Anthony Rose introduces a tasting of increasingly fashionable but still controversial and *recherché* single-vineyard Champagnes, at which he was joined by Essi Avellan MW and Michael Edwards

If the French belief in terroir is to be taken as gospel, most Champagne should be considered not a *vin de terroir* at all but a *vin d'assemblage*. The structure of the Champagne vineyards, whose growers own 88 percent of them, determines that the majority of négociant and cooperative-produced Champagnes—Non-Vintage especially—are the results of blending a multiplicity of parcels across villages, districts, and subregions. Not surprisingly, then, the concept of the single-vineyard Champagne, with its implications for the significance of terroir, is not one that's universally embraced by the Champenois, least of all by the marketing teams charged with promotion of the brand.

Yet single-vineyard Champagne is a concept whose time has come. Its currency has risen in stature, not to mention value, since the 1990s, as much from the Champagne growers' terroir-based *cri de coeur* as from a natural Champenois desire to expand the boundaries of its accepted styles. Are Champagnes from a single vineyard or village inherently superior to blends? It's a question that could more usefully be rephrased in terms suggested by Michael Edwards: "Rather than seeking to

establish the superiority of blends or of single-village [and single-vineyard] wines, we should be recognizing more thoughtfully their respective strengths."

In a region whose marginal climate and chalky bedrock are the building blocks for sparkling wines, the logic behind Champagne blending is based on the producer's need for consistency of house style. While there is no question that with two thirds of shipments, the financial muscle and critical mass of the best-known global brands has given them a dominance in export markets, the growing ability of the grower to add value to the brand by making and marketing his or her own Champagne has indubitably had a significant impact on the credibility and growth of the single-vineyard Champagne category.

As the market becomes more sophisticated and willing to look upon Champagne as not just a drink of celebration but a wine in its own right, an increasing number of the region's 15,000-odd growers has taken the plunge into making wines from their own vineyards. As Essi Avellan MW points out, "Grower Champagnes are challenging the large houses with very different

Original illustration by Charles Martin, *L'Art de Boire*, Établissements Nicolas, Paris, 1920

Not all single-vineyard Champagnes play the luxury cuvée game. Those such as Larmandier-Bernier and Egly-Ouriet—aimed more specifically at gastronomy, for instance—can be relatively moderately priced

marketing tools: hand-crafted wines with *gout de terroir*.” They may not have the global clout of Cristal or Dom Pérignon, but the likes of Alain Robert, Pierre Péters, Claude Cazals, and Anselme Selosse are among those in the van of an expanding realm of Burgundy-style connoisseurship based on individual domaines.

The phenomenon of the big houses making single-vineyard Champagnes began in 1935 with Philipponnat’s Clos des Goisses, to be followed soon after by Cattier’s 2.2ha (5-acre) Clos du Moulin, purchased in 1951. The first vintage of Krug’s Clos du Mesnil was 1979, followed by a flurry of single-vineyard/-village Champagnes in the 1990s onward, with the likes of Leclerc-Briant Les Authentiques, Billecart-Salmon’s Clos St-Hilaire, Diebolt-Valois’s Fleur du Passion, Claude Cazal’s Clos Cazals, Larmandier-Bernier’s Terre de Vertus, Egly-Ouriet’s Blanc de Noirs Les Crayères Vieilles Vignes, Veuve Fourny’s Le Clos Notre Dame, and Jean Milan’s Cuvée Terres de Noël Brut. More recently, Taittinger launched its Les Folies de la Marquetterie in 2006, and in 2008 the birth of Krug’s expensive new blanc de noirs, Clos d’Ambonnay, was announced to a fanfare of publicity.

Such single-vineyard (monoparcels) Champagnes should be distinguished from single-village (monocru) Champagnes, which tend to come from recognized grand cru sites within the *échelle des crus*. This is the classification of Champagne’s 34,500ha (85,250 acres) of vineyards (32,700ha [80,800 acres] in production), dating back to 1919, in which 319 villages were rated, initially to establish grape prices, at between 80 and 100 percent. The first known vintage of Salon as a monocru was 1911, and it has since maintained original owner Eugène Aimé Salon’s tradition of buying the best-known parcels in Le Mesnil to supplement his own production. Whether from a desire to cash in on a growing trend or an attempt to preempt, co-ops and négociants such as Nicolas Feuillatte and Moët & Chandon have embarked on monocru wines with mixed success, Moët having recently ceased production of its initially much-vaunted trio.

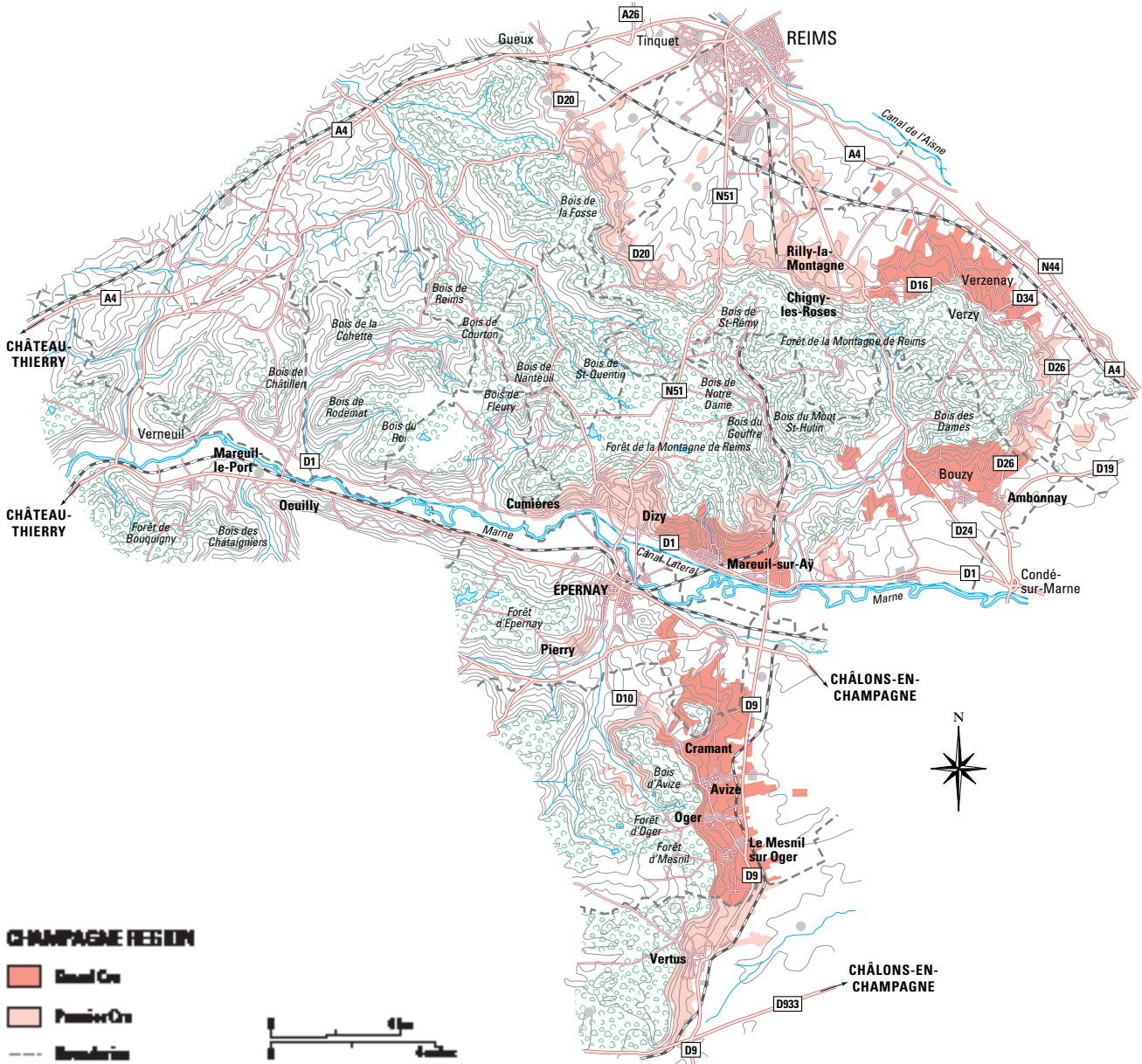
The single-vineyard category is based on three principal groupings. The first is the traditional small grower, whose wine is by definition single-vineyard because production is from his or her own small parcel of vines. Secondly, there is the grower who has specifically set out to make his or her wine as a reflection of its location. As Champagne specialist Richard Juhlin says,

“A lot of growers only have one plot. But it is not interesting if it is just a plot. It takes a great terroir and a good producer. They are able to reflect the serious side of Champagne.” Finally there are the houses such as Philipponnat, Jacquesson, Billecart-Salmon, and Krug, whose single-vineyard wines are based on a combination of a genuine belief in the superiority of location with a desire for the ultimate in prestige. What marks the latter two categories out in particular is that most such single-vineyard Champagnes are prestige cuvées, in which the significance of character, location, age of vine, length of aging on lees, and limitation in quantity are stressed.

While villages such as Le Mesnil (not forgetting Oger, Avize, and Cramant) account for the leading Chardonnay-based single-vineyard Champagnes of Krug, Cazals, and Robert, not all the great single-vineyard Champagnes are necessarily from grand cru villages or, for that matter, Chardonnay-based. Notable exceptions include Philipponnat’s Clos des Goisses (70 percent Pinot Noir; 99 percent premier cru), Billecart’s Clos St-Hilaire (100 percent Pinot Noir; 99 percent premier cru), and Taittinger’s Les Folies de la Marquetterie (55 percent Chardonnay; 90 percent premier cru), while Drappier’s Pinot Noir-based Grande Sèndrée for instance is way off the grand cru beaten track in the Aube. At the same time, not all single-vineyard Champagnes necessarily play the luxury cuvée game. Those such as Larmandier-Bernier and Egly-Ouriet—aimed more specifically at gastronomy, for instance—can be relatively moderately priced.

If the Champagne houses have a certain inherent difficulty in articulating the mystique of terroir, the dictates of fashion and rebranding are helping them overcome their scruples. Certainly at the high end there doesn’t appear to be any conflict, since the association of luxury with uniqueness and pedigree plays well with the notion of terroir. Thanks to being able to fall back on the general feelgood factor of brand Champagne, vintage differences can also be made to become part and parcel of the picture of authenticity. “For expert consumers, relationship to place has value,” says Essi Avellan, “because it made the wine a specific product of its environment, representing potential for a unique experience.” Production costs may be high, but so is profitability. If it’s authentic, rare, and ultra-fashionable, whether a product of terroir or not, at least the customer has been given plenty of good reasons for forking out for the privilege.

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**Flight 1: Côte des Blancs**

**Vertus**

- Larmandier-Bernier Terre de Vertus Blanc de Blancs NV
- Duval-Leroy Authentis Clos des Bouveries 2002
- Veuve Fourny & Fils Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame 1999

**Le Mesnil-sur-Oger**

- Pierre Péters Cuvée Spéciale (Les Chétilions) 2000
- Krug Clos du Mesnil 1998

**Oger**

- Franck Bonville Belles Voyes NV
- Jean Milan Les Terres de Noël 2002
- Claude Cazals Clos Cazals 1998

**Avize**

- Agrapart Vénus Brut Nature 2002
- Corbon Avize Grand Cru Chardonnay 2000 (Les Maladreries du Nord)
- Alain Thiénot La Vigne aux Gamins 1999

**Cramant**

- Larmandier-Bernier Vieille Vigne de Cramant 2004

**ME:** Quite illuminating... What is apparent immediately is that Mesnil needs an awful lot of time. The Vertus wines were very attractive now, particularly the Veuve Fourny. I thought that was a lovely wine.  
**EA:** A really fascinating flight. I think I'm going to enjoy and learn a lot from this tasting! The Larmandier-Bernier was perhaps the most disappointing of the

Vertus wines. It's a true terroir wine in the sense that it's *non-dosé* and biodynamic. It lacks charm and is very, very young but great for friends of this purist, terroir Champagne style. The Duval-Leroy was a pleasant surprise, combining the elegant Vertus terroir with the drinkability and charm of the commercial house style, which didn't mask the terroir. I agree completely with Michael that the Veuve-Fourny was a really lovely wine.

**ME:** Yes...

**EA:** It was what you would expect from these single-vineyard wines. Great personality and typicity, not too polished—fascinating.

**AR:** I thought the Mesnil wines slightly overshadowed the Vertus wines, which is perhaps only to be expected because they

are more structured and longer-lived. I liked the Larmandier-Bernier, but I did find it quite earthy and rustic. You could argue that this is part of its terroir charm—it's part of the wine, I think. Not a great wine but certainly interesting and certainly a terroir wine. I found the Duval-Leroy a bit tart. The combination of the high acidity and aggressive spritz was a little bit aggressive for my liking. I liked the balance of the Veuve Fourny.

**ME:** So do I.

**AR:** The Mesnil wines showed their class here. Pierre Péters was stylish and very pungent, with an evolved nose, almost

*dosage* is a bit high. But it's certainly a wine of terroir—it's quite chewy. It's a very individual wine, isn't it? I can't make up my mind about it...

**AR:** I agree about the *dosage*, which is slightly sweet and adds a slightly heavy, doughnutty element, but it's fresh on the finish. On the nose it was odd: waxy like a Hunter Semillon. Unusual and different, and I wasn't totally convinced by it.

**ME:** I think it would be improved by lower *dosage*.

**EA:** I didn't find the *dosage* all that high. It's opening up nicely in the glass. Definitely a terroir wine.

the bottom and makes wine for long aging. The 2000 has lots of reserve and will keep well. La Vigne aux Gamins is higher, on the more chalky soils. Thiénot started off with wood but abandoned it because it masked the terroir. Larmandier-Bernier is a great wine but much too young to drink. Cramant has a reputation for feminine and rather floral wine, but this vineyard is very close to the Cuis border and is much more structured.

**AR:** I found the Agrapart very pungent and evolved on the nose for such a young Champagne but more youthful on the palate. Very Chardonnay, apparently oaked,

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the best sites in the village” Michael Edwards

white chocolate in aroma, a fine-textured mousse that's younger than the nose suggests, fine, balancing, citrusy freshness, excellent length of flavor, power, and cleansing acidity—overall, a very stylish and complete Champagne. Krug lived up to its reputation: powerful and intense on the nose, with oaky hints of toast and coffee, while the spicy oak follows through on the palate, which is rich yet fresh, intense, mouth-filling, and savory. It is a stylish, classic Champagne with superb vinosity and backbone, so much so that it's only just starting to get into its stride but should continue in this vein very nicely for another decade.

**ME:** The Clos du Mesnil is very good, but it is very backward and needs a lot of time. I think it's actually a triumph of winemaking over terroir. It's not the best site in Mesnil by any means, but Krug are brilliant winemakers. It has less terroir character than the Péters, I think. I marked them more or less the same, but they're very different wines.

**EA:** The Mesnil wines were as expected—really classy and powerful. Cuvée Spéciale was a pleasant surprise to me: clean, mouth-fillingly rich, yet still with great freshness. Perhaps recently disgorged. Krug was also a happy surprise—happily not much oak or oxidation impact. I agree with you that it's a made wine.

**ME:** In the best sense!

**EA:** Yes, absolutely. But it also had good typicity of the vintage, an elegant Champagne, a non-blockbuster Clos du Mesnil like the 1996. A good set!

**ME:** I found the Franck Bonville wine quite difficult to assess... There's a lot there, but there's something lacking. For a start, the

**ME:** I liked both the other Oger wines. Les Terres de Noël is a little plot behind the house, as these selected vineyards so often are. It's not on their best terroir, but it is a very individual wine. The Milans talk about a smell of Parmesan cheese, though I don't get it myself. There's certainly a lot of minerality there. It's not overextracted winemaking; it's quite elegant. It's made in wood, but it's not apparent. Clos Cazals is also very good: beautifully balanced but completely different. Oger is often rather overshadowed by Mesnil, but in many ways it's just as fine, though different—it's more rounded and generous.

**EA:** All three of the Oger wines showed their character very well. But it also showed that having a good parcel is important, because Clos Cazals was clearly the best wine here. Better winemaking would take away the rustic edge and turn it into a fabulous wine.

**AR:** Clos Cazals was my favorite by at least a mark. Superbly evolved, intense toast and sourdough nose showing perfect evolution and announcing itself ready for drinking, which it is: a fine, stylish, mouth-filling, full-flavored corn-chips Chardonnay, quite vinous in body, and with excellent backbone and stylish acidity, finishing elegantly dry. Possibly it was flattered by being a bit older than the other wines.

**ME:** Milan and Cazals probably have the best sites in the village by far. With Avize, terroir really comes into play. Agrapart is at the lower end of the village, where there is a lot of clay, so the wine had quite a lot of punch. But he has a very light touch with winemaking. Vénus is named after his horse, incidentally! A successful wine but not a great wine. Corbon is also down in

with vanilla and spice on the nose, too. The palate is rich and dry and more youthful than the nose suggests; a fine, rich, honeycomb mousse, with good acidity, full flavor, balance, and distinctive character. Corbon I was less struck by. It starts a tad shy on the nose, ditto on the palate, with plenty of Chardonnay richness cut by slightly aggressive, tart acidity, though the wine improves on the palate with an attractively rich mousse in a balanced style overall, despite slight extremes of sweetness and tang. I couldn't work out the Alain Thiénot at all... A little bit earthy and peppery, almost Grüner Veltliner-like on the nose. But I gave it a good mark for the label on the bottle! I liked the Vieille Vigne de Cramant. Quite Chardonnay/winey on the palate, with greater appley vinosity than Champagne mousse, but good underlying fresh acidity and overall an attractive drink that's definitely making an effort to show Côte des Blancs terroir.

**EA:** I liked the purity of the Agrapart winemaking. A lovely if not truly fine wine and a very good example of a pure grower terroir wine. I liked the Corbon very much! I loved the contrast of the acidity at the back, refreshing with a lemony bite, and that to me is what Avize should be: an iron fist inside a velvet glove. I didn't get Thiénot at all, either, and even less after seeing the label! A reductive nose that does not reveal much fruit, and firm and tight on the palate, lacking the pleasure factor and total cleanliness. Very dry, earthy, and spicy. I agree that the Vieille Vigne de Cramant was better than the first Larmandier-Bernier wine. But there's a contradiction between the ease of the nose and the closed nature of the palate. Some 6-12

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months more in bottle or increased *dosage* would help.

## Flight 2: Vallée de la Marne

### Verneuil

Leclerc-Briant Les Authentiques La Ravinne NV

### Mareuil-le-Port

Dehours Lieu-Dit Brisefer 2002

### Oeuilly

Tarlant Cuvée La Vigne d'Antan 2000 (Les Sables)

Tarlant Cuvée La Vigne d'Or 1999 (Pierre de Bellevue)

Tarlant Cuvée Louis Brut NV (Les Crayons)

### Epernay

Leclerc-Briant Les Authentiques La Croisette NV

### Piery

Taittinger Les Folies de la Marquetterie NV

### Cumières

Leclerc-Briant Les Authentiques Les Chèvres Pierreuses NV

Leclerc-Briant Les Authentiques Les Crayères NV

### Dizy

Jacquesson Corne Bautray 2000

### Mareuil-sur-Aÿ

Billecart-Salmon Clos St-Hilaire 1996  
Philipponnat Clos des Goisses 1991

EA: Not so exciting, this flight... We have moved to the Vallée de la Marne, so obviously it's a different style, and there are fewer grand cru villages, which raises

restrained and lacks great intensity but is still broad and charming with good length. Very enjoyable and drinkable Champagne. Quite tight on the palate, though. I had some problems with the Tarlants, too. The Vigne d'Antan was corked. The Cuvée La Vigne d'Or was also 100 percent Pinot Meunier, and it had more personality than the Leclerc-Briant La Ravinne. The Cuvée Louis Brut was a step up in quality, muscular on the palate.

ME: The Leclerc-Briant La Ravinne was interesting for being Pinot Meunier, but it was pretty bog standard... There are much better exponents of it, I think. I quite liked the Dehours Brisefer—racy and persistently flavored, it has everything. I've always liked Cuvée Louis and it is certainly a step up, quite subtly done. Middling results overall, I agree...

AR: I found the Leclerc-Briant La Ravinne pleasant enough, but there's not much to say about it. The La Croisette was positively unpleasant, with some underlying aldehydic notes, which follow through to the palate where the sweetness of *dosage* and rather strange flavors contribute to the overall lack of balance. My favorite was the Dehours because it had that crafted winemaking character—quite a lot of lees stirring, almost like a Puligny-Champagne. Quite a lot of winemaking rather than terroir, but I liked it. Of the Tarlants, the Vigne d'Or was slightly oxidative, so my favorite was the Cuvée Louis, a youthful Champagne with good intensity of flavor. Not a great Champagne but I'd happily drink it.

ME: Tarlant is a classic example of not having great vineyards from which to produce wines... The vineyards face north!

AR: There's that tartness on the Cuvée Louis...

ME: The Taittinger surprised and delighted me. It's actually got quite a taste of terroir

though in a certain old-fashioned, deep-flavored Pinot style. They have greatly improved on the first vintage in 1995, which was zero *dosage*, but this has about 4 grams. They've injected some tension and finesse into the wine. A great gastronomic wine, with years ahead of it. It's a big, full-on wine and very different to their more delicate house style. The power and substance of what is a real wine is relieved by a burgeoning finesse and tension as it ages—a tribute to its great winemaker, François Domi. Extremely long and complex: the end flavors persist for 90 seconds. Magnificent expression of Pinot Noir. Clos des Goisses is a completely different style but equally lovely. A better vineyard than Clos St-Hilaire—south-facing, lots of sun, with chalk soil. They're right to blend it with a little bit of Chardonnay, which gives it some lift. Great wine.

EA: I've always been a big fan of Les Folies de la Marquetterie. It's my house Champagne, and I think I've opened more bottles of it than anybody else outside Taittinger! Really lovely, with lots of personality, and very different from any other wine made by Taittinger. It's vinified in *foudres* and is consequently richer and rounder. They love to play around with this wine—it's very much a made wine—but the vineyard has a great story to tell. I agree about the Jacquesson: a little bit of old-oak aroma but otherwise nicely dry and vinous and a good gastronomic Champagne. I last tasted the Clos St-Hilaire in October, I think, when it was a monster, and it has evolved really nicely. I had a little bit of trouble with the Clos des Goisses' nose—it had a weird, cheesy-biscuit, yeasty edge to it. But the structure was great. This 1991 shows the potential of Clos des Goisses in lesser vintages, but it's not a great Clos des Goisses.

AR: I found the Taittinger very enjoyable,

"I've always been a big fan of Les Folies de la Marquetterie. Really lovely, with lots of personality, and very different from any other wine made by Taittinger. It's very much a made wine—but the vineyard has a great story to tell" Essi Avellan

the question about why make single-vineyard wines in lesser villages? None of the Leclerc-Briant wines was worth making, in my opinion, though the Les Authentiques La Ravinne was interesting as a 100 percent Pinot Meunier. The La Croisette had a slightly stewed fruit character, with lifted volatile notes and a dusty, unpleasant finish. My favorite was the Dehours Lieu-Dit Brisefer—already deliciously toasty and open, developing nose. The palate is more

to it. Quite a beefy palate—*goût anglais*—lots of flavor and character, delightful. Not much to say about Leclerc-Briant, I'm afraid... Very young tasting. The Jacquesson is an unusual and interesting wine, fermented in oak. Corne Bautray is not a great vineyard—it's high up the hill by the woods, and it's not on chalk, so it's quite a strong wine. It has quite a big presence but with a delicate, saline finish that raised it a bit. The Clos St-Hilaire is magnificent,

quite youthful on the palate, distinctive character, with plenty of toasty richness in evidence and a finely textured mousse, making for a well-crafted example of its kind, even if hard to place the terroir. I didn't go for either of the Leclerc-Briant wines, I'm afraid... I liked the toastiness of the Jacquesson very much, and it had minerality and length. Billecart-Salmon was my highest mark of the tasting so far—beautifully evolved nose of toast, grilled

nuts, and honey. The palate is still incredibly fresh and intense, with a lightness of touch in the mousse that belies the intensity of flavor and power of this stylish, concentrated, vinous Champagne, showing all the class and length of vintage and terroir. The Clos des Goisses is still youthful in appearance but quite evolved on the nose, with a slight cheese-rind character and yet a lovely, seductively pungent

shy. A little bit elemental, but I did like that style. I found the acidity of the Ledru Cuvée de Goulté slightly eye-watering. It had some kirsch-like undertones, and I couldn't quite work it out, but perhaps we should give it the benefit of the doubt—I think it might develop into something nice. Egly-Ouriet had a powerful structure and good fresh acidity, belying the rather one-dimensional, *goût anglais* aromatic

it. Egly-Ouriet was oxidized and really pungent, but that's not surprising after 62 months on the lees... The Drappier was not hugely fine but had a lot of personality.

### Conclusions

**AR:** There seem to be all sorts of reasons for making single-vineyard Champagnes—from the obviously terroir, to the obviously

“Overall there is a positive message that there is something new and different that they're trying to do. And it's a good thing, as long as it is not turned into another prestige cuvée category and consumers are priced out of the market” Anthony Rose

sweet-pea aroma. Very fresh and elegant on the palate, but for me just beginning to show its age and evolution, so it needs to be drunk now.

**ME:** I tasted the 1991 Clos des Goisses about three months ago, and it didn't have that cheesy nose.

**EA:** Yes. Last time I tasted it, the aromas were not this strange. Probably some bottle variation.

#### Flight 3: Montagne de Reims and Côte des Bar

##### Gueux

**Jérôme Prévost Brut Nature La Closerie Les Béguines NV**

##### Rilly-la-Montagne

**Vilmart & Cie Cuvée Creation 1998**

##### Chigny-les-Roses

**Cattier Clos du Moulin NV**

##### Ambonnay

**Marie-Noëlle Ledru Cuvée de Goulté 2004**

**Egly-Ouriet Blanc de Noirs Les Crayères NV**

##### Urville

**Drappier Grande Sendrée 2002**

**AR:** La Closerie Les Béguines had a yeasty, almost beery, horseradishy nose, following through with quite a rustic, beery-yeasty Pinot Meunier palate but nice fresh acidity, so overall rather yeast-dominated for the lager and Champagne lovers of this world. The Vilmart was comparatively youthful for its age, with stylish overall balance, showing the benefit of lees aging with lots of autolysis-derived flavors. The Cattier was relatively unformed, pale in color, and quite

character. Not a great wine, but I do like it. The Drappier I liked very much, a really good wine. Very well made, and it should repay keeping for a good 5-10 years.

**ME:** When I first tasted Prévost some years ago, I was very much of Anthony's opinion today. But I think the wine has changed for the better. I quite like the nose, actually—it reminds me of brioche in the oven. It's a very broad wine, not a wine of great finesse. Very distinctive, with good use of oak. I can see the quality of the Vilmart, but in what is supposedly a tasting of *Champagnes de terroirs*, this one is marked by very skilled winemaking rather than a sense of place... When Cattier is on form, it can be very good. It's academic, because most people drink Champagne as soon as it's open, but I find that if you keep it in the glass for ten minutes, it does change quite a lot. I was intrigued by Ledru. It was very young, but it could develop quite well. Like Anthony, I would like to reserve judgment on this. I was disappointed by the Egly-Ouriet... The Drappier is lovely, with every quality you could want in a Champagne.

**EA:** A fascinating bunch. I have not liked Prévost in previous tastings, but this was the best sample I've had. Much more wine than Champagne, in which the bubbles are merely incidental. Either you like it or hate it. To me, it's not Champagne.

**ME:** That's a very common reaction.

**EA:** The Vilmart I liked. In previous tastings and vintages, I have found it too oaky, but here it was less obvious and more creamy and buttery—a wine rather than a Champagne. Long and intense, but the manufacturing is masking terroir. The Cattier was beautifully balanced through blending of the two vintages. Clearly a definitive terroir expression. Marie-Noëlle Ledru was so young—why is a 2004 being released so soon? I loved the fruitiness in

commercial. But there is no real consistency of thought.

**EA:** It's usually a combination of reasons. It was fascinating to taste the wines in this order, and we could see different things from the different parts of Champagne. Some of the wines clearly do not deserve their single-vineyard status, but when they are good, they're really wonderful.

**ME:** You have to keep a sense of proportion with single-vineyard Champagnes and not talk of them as though they were Musigny or something. The great thing about Champagne is the mousse, which does change the character of the wine a lot.

**EA:** They open up the possibility to Champagne lovers of knowing what is Ambonnay and what is Avize, in contrast to the perfected blending.

**ME:** They show the real diversity and choice of Champagne, I think.

**AR:** Champagne is the most successful appellation because it is a blended, non-terroir appellation. So, to see growers trying to make wines that reflect what the French swear by as the criterion of how we should be judging their wines is a great thing. There is a mixture here of wines that do conform to the terroir message and others that are disappointing failures, but overall there is a positive message that there is something new and different that they're trying to do. And overall it's a good thing, as long as it is not turned into another prestige cuvée category and consumers are priced out of the market.

**EA:** I don't agree with the concept of single-vineyard wines being the top wines or luxury cuvées. It's senseless, even if rarity costs. But that's not the point. It's really for Champagne lovers.

**ME:** Yes, quite. And think of the price range within this tasting... But that's Champagne, *non*? ■