

# YEAR'S BEST CHAMPAGNE

Our blind panels tasted **294** new-release Champagnes over the past 12 months. **Joshua Greene**, our critic for Champagne, rated **87** as exceptional (90+) and **30** as Best Buys. We present the wines by house, accompanied here with short profiles by **Caitlin Griffith**, **Stephanie Johnson** and **Tara Q. Thomas**. Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at [wineandspiritsmagazine.com](http://wineandspiritsmagazine.com).

## L. AUBRY FILS

Brothers Philippe and Pierre Aubry trace their family's winegrowing roots to 1790. They farm 42 acres of premier cru vineyards in Montagne de Reims, including a hefty 40 percent of pinot meunier. They also grow varieties rare in contemporary Champagne vineyards, including arbanne, fromenteau and petite meslier, long abandoned by most producers. They encourage malolactic conversion in all of the cuvées and keep dosages low, resulting in rich and precise wines. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Spysset, NY*

### 91 | L. Aubry Fils \$43

**Champagne Brut 1er Cru (Best Buy)** This is not your typical non-vintage Brut. The Aubry brothers include ancient indigenous varieties, which make up five percent of the blend: pinot meunier accounts for 45 percent, the balance in equal parts pinot noir and chardonnay. Nearly half of the blend is reserve wine, half of that coming from a solera made up of vintages going back to 1998. If all that seems complicated, the wine is not. Instead, it tastes like an essential Champagne, with scents of chalk, oyster mushroom, pear skin and lemon pulp creating a bold surround-sound of flavor. There's purity to the expression and a healthy weight to the wine. Pour it with sea bass roasted with chanterelles.

### 90 | L. Aubry Fils \$60

**Champagne Brut Rosé 1er Cru** A delicate woodland berry scent introduces this strawberry-pink rosé. The texture is silken and the finish completely dry, glowing red through the bubbles. A dark and earthy rosé, this comes entirely from the 2010 vintage.

## AYALA

Established in 1860 in Ay by Edmond de Ayala, this house was one of the founding members of the group of Grandes Marques in 1882. Now owned by the Bollinger family, Ayala has a style marked by low dosage and a focus on chardonnay. Cellar master Caroline Latrive crafts the wines from the house's 35 acres in the grand cru of Ay and blends

them with grapes from vineyards throughout the Montagne de Reims. She believes in acidity, producing nervous wines, confident in style, and versatile with food. *Vintus, Pleasantville, NY*

### 95 | Ayala \$165

**2002 Champagne Brut Cuvée Perle d'Ayala** Ah, 2002. Where else but in Champagne can you buy a 12-year-old wine with this freshness of fruit, immediately brisk with scents of lemon and orange, generously layering in flavors of golden plums? At first, all that fruit seems heady, but air brings out the rootier depths, acidity ghosting the finish with the sort of masculine power that will make great 2002s riveting wines for decades. If you open this now, decant it and have a platter of shellfish on hand, especially cracked crab claws.

### 92 | Ayala \$70

**Champagne Brut Rosé Majeur** A lovely fresh pinot noir, this is focused on the herbal, spicy imprint of the soil. Its red berry scents and pink peppercorn spice frame the earthiness, while nervous acidity brightens the flavors and carries them through a long finish. Serve it with thinly sliced *magret de canard*, seared rare.

### 91 | Ayala \$90

**2005 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs** A zaftig 2005, this has the robust fullness of the vintage and a relatively gentle structure in the context of Ayala's other wines. It's robust with scents of pale leeks and lemon, as well as more delicate apple blossoms. Ready to drink with creamy seafood dishes.

### 90 | Ayala \$50

**Champagne Brut Majeur (Best Buy)** Luscious ripeness lends this wine a quince-like flavor, feeling round and generous against the chalky briskness of Champagne. For all its fruitiness, this is dry, firm and grounded, a clean aperitif or a first-course wine for a rabbit terrine.

## BARONS DE ROTHSCHILD

A joint venture between three branches of the Rothschild family — Benjamin of **Château Clarke**, Eric of Château Lafite and Philippine and her son, Philippe, of Château Mouton — these Champagnes are tight yet full-bodied, with plenty of acidity to carry the weight. *Pasternak Wine Imports, Harrison, NY*

### 90 | Barons de Rothschild \$99

**Champagne Brut** Made with a majority of chardonnay from Côte des Blancs grand cru sites, fleshed out with 40 percent reserve wines and aged at least three years before release, this balances a fresh nectarine richness with more oxidative almond notes. Citrus acidity juices up the flavor, holding it tight and savory as it races through a tense, mouthwatering finish, directing its richness toward seared arctic char.

## BESSERAT DE BELLEFON

Founded in 1843 by Edmund Besserat in Ay, the house took on its current form in 1927 when grandson Edmund Besserat married Yvonne de Méric de Bellefon. Cellar master Cédric Thiébaud crafts the wines in Epernay, vinifying them from grapes pulled from the winery's 62 acres (mostly Marne Valley) in addition to purchased fruit. *Winesellers, Niles, IL*

### 91 | Besserat de Bellefon \$70

**2002 Champagne Brut Cuvée des Moines (Best Buy)** With 31 percent pinot meunier and 54 percent chardonnay in the blend, this 2002 is mature and luxurious, more accessible than many in the vintage. It focuses on nutty scents of pistachio and walnut, with vanilla and beeswax adding to the generosity of its flavors. Heady, succulent and rich, this is ready to drink with a seafood terrine.

### 88 | Besserat de Bellefon \$50

**Champagne Brut Cuvée des Moines (Best Buy)** This wine's green apple and mineral scents have an oxidative tone, bringing to mind Fino Sherry. It's rich and smoky, solidly built, balanced by touches of bitterness. For smoked salmon and crème fraîche.

**BILLECART-SALMON**

Founded in 1818, after Nicolas-François Billecart married Elisabeth Salmon, Billecart-Salmon is now run by brothers François and Antoine Roland-Billecart. They oversee 37 acres of vineyards, mostly in the Marne Valley, with an additional 10 acres of grands crus in Chouilly, Avize and Le Mesnil-sur-Oger in the Côte des Blancs. Cellar master François Domi vinifies most parcels separately; he "double cold settles" his must, following that with a cold and slow fermentation—up to five weeks in some cases—in an effort to preserve the fruit aromas of the grapes, pinot meunier in particular. He allows malolactic in certain years, and uses barrels for a portion of the vintage wines, as well as the Sous Bois cuvée. The result is a portfolio of wines defined by finesse combined with power, fruit expression leading their direction. *T. Edwards Wines, NY*

**93 | Billecart-Salmon** \$100  
**1999 Champagne Brut Cuvée Nicolas François Billecart** A complex and dynamic Champagne, this layer the cinnamon scent of oak over white chalk and fresh pear, all deepened by an umami richness (a portion of the blend was aged in neutral oak barrels). It has the light grandeur of the 1999 vintage and appears to be at an optimal moment for drinking right now.

**92 | Billecart-Salmon** \$80  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru** A pure Côte des Blancs chardonnay, this includes 25 percent reserve wine in the blend. At first, everything about it is white, from chalk to oyster mushroom and grapefruit pith. That dry sensation yields to yellow fruit, cushioning the wine's austerity and bringing a little warm sweetness to the end. It has a powerful presence without weight, and it feels like it will benefit from several years of bottle age.

**92 | Billecart-Salmon** \$83  
**Champagne Brut Sous Bois** Vinified in oak, this cuvée emphasizes more earthiness than the other Billecart wines we tasted. The only hint of wood is in a touch of walnut-skin bitterness, but that is subsumed into a mousse of chalk, a fragrant juice of limestone. It's tight and firm, finishing clean, needing air or bottle age to fully express its complexity.

**91 | Billecart-Salmon** \$50  
**Champagne Brut Réserve (Best Buy)** This blend includes 40 percent pinot meunier, the balance equal parts pinot noir and chardonnay. Its remarkable fruitiness might be

tied to the firm's long, slow, cool fermentations, which, they believe, allow meunier to maintain its perfume. This is a graceful, vinous Champagne with dramatic high notes of roses and red fruit, finishing clean with a grounding of pale earthiness. It's a lovely prediction of what Champagne might become in a warming climate.

**BOLLINGER**

Bollinger, founded in 1829, is one of the rare Grandes Marques that's still family owned, with sixth-generation Etienne Bizot, great-nephew of Lily Bollinger, as managing director. The Ay-based company has 399 acres of vines spread among 30 vineyard sites, 12 of which are grands crus and 16 premiers crus. These vineyards—60 percent pinot noir—provide nearly two-thirds of the house's production. That accent on pinot noir plays out in deep, rich wines with red fruit infusing their fine bubbles. Oak also plays an important part in Bollinger's house style, in tandem with reserve wines. Bollinger has its own cooperage to maintain 3,000 barrels for fermenting base wines; and the house boasts 600,000 magnums of reserve wines. Those elements come together in regal Champagnes, elegant and substantial enough to drink throughout dinner. *Verlato Wines Int'l, Lake Bluff, IL*

**96 | Bollinger** \$235  
**2004 Champagne Brut La Grande Année Rosé** Barrel fermentation gives this wine ornate complexity, while its crisp structural lines make it feel very contemporary French. The plump red fruit races with dynamism, extending the suppleness of the texture into more dramatic territory than where Champagne often ventures, and lasts with a gentler, floral grace. A youthful ten-year-old wine, this is built for long development in the cellar.

**92 | Bollinger** \$110  
**Champagne Brut Rosé** There's a tinge of copper to this wine's color and a hint of strawberry and jasmine in its scent, but there's nothing obvious or overt about it. For a rosé with this much richness and roundness, it holds itself tight, a delicious, smoky evocation of limestone.

**90 | Bollinger** \$75  
**Champagne Brut Special Cuvée** At every turn of flavor, barrel-fermented base wines add opulence to this Champagne with scents of apple wood, ginger and mustard seed balancing the youthful fruit. The flavors buzz with acidity and richness, a contrast of green apple with broader notes of baked apple;

the texture is creamy, the finish completely clean. The wine's structure is substantial enough to serve with sliced, seared beef filet at a holiday party.

**FRANCIS BOULARD**

Francis Boulard left his family's estate, Raymond Boulard, after 38 years, when his siblings refused to let him convert the entire estate to biodynamics. He took with him the seven acres he'd already converted to organics, and launched a new estate in 2010 with his daughter Delphine. Working from plots spread among the Massif de St-Thierry, Marne Valley and Montagne de Reims, relying solely on indigenous yeasts and vinifying in old wood, these are vinous wines, precise and focused. *Louis/Dressner Selections, NY*

**91 | Francis Boulard** \$75  
**Champagne Brut Nature Maily-Champagne Grand Cru** This is pinot noir (90 percent) from the clay limestone soils of Maily in the Montagne de Reims, vinified in oak without added yeast, blended with 30 percent reserve wines. The result, even with malolactic fermentation, is a wine that's completely naked, "screaming minerality," as one taster described it, sucking all the sweetness from your mouth and leaving a vacuum to be filled by an oyster. Give it some time in the glass and a nectarine character develops, adding juiciness and gentling the bitterness of the lees. Dramatic Champagne, this will mellow with bottle age.

**PIERRE BRIGANDAT**

Pierre Brigandat was a banker before his winemaking hobby got the best of him and he quit his job to focus full-time on wine in 1985. His son Bertrand, who started working with him in 1993, now runs the estate in Channes, working with the fruit off their 17 acres in the Aube villages of Les Riceys, Channes and Buxeuil. All the wines are vinified in enamel-coated stainless steel tanks and left on their lees until the late spring/early summer after harvest, making for rich, fruity wines best suited to the dinner table. *Bouhonne Wine Imports, South Orange, NJ*

**89 | Pierre Brigandat** \$57  
**2005 Champagne Brut (Best Buy)** There's a delicate scent of pressed flowers and wild-flower honey under this wine's pale lees scents of baking spice and brioche. The leanness plays an assertive role, as does the tart lemon lime fruit, magnified by the generous, velvety ripeness of the vintage. Pour it with the fried chicken and biscuits at *The Dutch* in NYC.

## CHARTOGNE-TAILLET

Young Alexandre Chartogne did a *stage* with Anselme Selosse in Avize before taking over this 28.4-acre estate in Merfy. He applies biodynamic principles in the vineyards and cellar, vinifying each parcel separately, some in neutral barriques and concrete eggs, allowing malolactic fermentation to occur naturally. The wines are rich with leesy and brioche notes. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**88 | Chartogne-Taillet** \$47  
**Champagne Brut Cuvée Sainte-Anne (Best Buy)** An equal blend of pinot noir and chardonnay builds this classic, straightforward Champagne. The flavors of baked apple and yellow plums are soft and creamy, with a pleasant sweetness to the fruit. It's a clean and gentle wine for aperitifs.

## GASTON CHIQUET

Nicolas Chiquet farms 56.8 acres of premier and grand cru vineyards in the Vallée de la Marne, in the villages of Ay, Dizy, Hautvillers and Mareuil-sur-Ay. He vinifies all of his base wines in stainless steel and allows malolactic fermentation to occur, with a style that shows ample fruit and a chiseled chalkiness. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**91 | Gaston Chiquet** \$77  
**2005 Champagne Brut Special Club (Best Buy)** This has the openness and richness of the 2005 vintage, layering scents of wild-flower honey over pale, stony depths. The finish is tight, even as the texture is soft and accessible, suggesting that another year or two of age will bring more complexity.

**87 | Gaston Chiquet** \$49  
**Champagne Brut Tradition 1er Cru (Best Buy)** This wine bristles with floral notes and acidity, powered by a frothy mousse. Then it settles into a richer feel in the finish, where the nutty flavors feel cushioned by a pleasantly sweet dosage. Those elements should combine well over the next year in bottle; then serve it with cracked crab.

## DELAMOTTE

Founded in 1760, Delamotte is now owned by Laurent Perrier. Based in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, the firm shares its winemaking team with Salon—and, at times, uses the coveted Salon fruit. Both houses are under the direction of Didier Depond and cellar master Michel Fauconnet, who vinifies in stainless steel and allows full malolactic fermentation. *Vineyard Brands, Birmingham, AL*



**91 | Delamotte** \$95  
**2002 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs** Last year, this wine was buzzing with limestone acidity; this year, its grandeur and opulence shows mainly in the remarkably long finish, while the acidity is taut, closing off the wine rather than energizing it. Completely dry, this feels like it's in a holding pattern, waiting to take off. A well-priced 2002 with a strong future ahead.

## DOM PERIGNON

Once the prestige *cuvée* of Moët et Chandon, today Dom Pérignon is an autonomous house devoted to producing only vintage wines. Richard Geoffroy, who was born in Vertus, has been the chef de cave since 1990, overseeing estate vineyards in all 17 grands crus as well as the Hautvillers premier cru. He vinifies his wines in stainless steel to emphasize their clarity and precision, producing elegant Champagnes built to age; he releases his Oenothèque wines at what he considers their peak intensity (15 to 20 years) or their peak of complexity (around 30 years). *Moët Hennessy USA, NY*

**96 | Dom Pérignon** \$159  
**2004 Champagne Brut Complex** and layered with scents of corn silk, white mushrooms and pale red fruit, this is a study in contrasts: grand and austere, honeyed and dry. It's not one thing but all things Champagne, high in freshness, ethereal in its mineral refinement. Delicious on its own or with any fresh shellfish.

## PASCAL DOQUET

Pascal Doquet and his wife, Laure, are based in Vertus, where they work with the fruit of their six acres of grand cru vineyards and 31 acres of premier cru vines in the Côte des Blancs; as of 2010, all their parcels were certified organic. Vinified in both stainless steel and oak, these wines range across a wide style spectrum, from creamy to plummy to yeasty. *Robert Kacher Selections, NY*

**95 | Pascal Doquet** \$120  
**2004 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Le Mesnil-sur-Oger Grand Cru** Scents of ginger and ginseng introduce the earthy, rooky side of this rich chardonnay Cham-

pagne. That dark, baritone resonance carries through the wine, contrasted in the finish by an almost searing acidity that cuts through the richness and leaves a naked, harmonious impression of pure limestone.

**94 | Pascal Doquet** \$65  
**Champagne Brut Horizon Blanc de Blancs** This is a vivid evocation of fresh white peach, made all the more dramatic by a buzz of limestone acidity. It's a simple, sunny stroke of flavor, supple and lasting on the cool of a deep limestone cave. Seductive chardonnay.

**93 | Pascal Doquet** \$75  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Le Mesnil-sur-Oger Grand Cru** A grander, more luxurious wine than the Horizon, this is powerful in its savory richness. It has the pale smokiness of chardonnay grown in limestone, an austere pear flavor, as well as the yeasty notes of bottle age. Heady and rich, this has the structure to match foie gras.

**93 | Pascal Doquet** \$70  
**Champagne Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Côte des Blancs 1er Cru** Bright, zesty, clean and fresh, this is what an Extra Brut Champagne should be. There's enough spice and sunny richness that there's no need to smooth it out with more dosage. This is the sort of integrated, sophisticated Champagne that may leave you craving oysters.

## DOYARD

The Doyards have grown grapes in Champagne for 12 generations, and made wine for four. Today, Yannick Doyard runs the estate in Vertus, farming about 25 acres of vines in the Côte des Blancs under biodynamics; most of his parcels are in grand crus. The Cuvée Vendémiaire was the standout in our tasting, a 100-percent chardonnay with 30 percent malolactic and low dosage. *AL Selections, Long Island City, NY*

**90 | Doyard** \$45  
**Champagne Brut Cuvée Vendémiaire (Best Buy)** The briskness of this wine evokes the clean, crisp feel of biting into a buttered radish. There's nothing grand about its mineral-ringed refreshment, and the fizz keeps it spicy straight through.

## EGLY-OURIET

Egly Ouriet owns 24 acres of grand cru vineyards primarily in Ambonnay, with smaller plots in Bouzy and Verzeny. The vineyards are planted to 75 percent pinot noir and 25 percent chardonnay, with a 3.5-acre plot of premier cru pinot meunier in Vrgny, Fran-

dis Egly harvests relatively late, vinifies about half of the wines in oak, doesn't fine or filter his Champagnes and bottles with low dosage. The wines are ripe, bold and vinous in character. *Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**91 | Egly-Ouriet** \$48  
**Champagne Brut Tradition Grand Cru (Best Buy)** From Francis Egly's grand cru vineyards in Ambonnay, Bouzy and Verzenay, this is a blend of 70 percent pinot noir and 30 percent chardonnay. Half the wine is from the 2007 vintage; the balance is a blend of the three previous vintages; Egly ferments 20 percent of the wine in barrel. All that to explain the wine's richness: Creamy suggestions of caramel, pear, praline and toasted almond before the freshness of the acidity binds the flavors into a clean, savory endnote. Delicious with roast sea bass and chanterelles.

#### CHARLES ELLNER

Founded in 1972 by professional riddler Charles Ellner, this Epernay-based estate encompasses 133 acres across 15 villages, providing fruit for 70 percent of the production. The balance comes from purchased grapes. The wines ferment primarily in stainless steel and malolactic fermentation is discouraged. *Massano's Imports, Washington, D.C.*

**89 | Charles Ellner** \$65  
**2002 Champagne Brut Séduction (Best Buy)** This wine balances searing acidity with enough richness to create a simple, limestone-inflected Champagne. It's flavors are somewhat muted for now and the wine may develop further with bottle age.

**88 | Charles Ellner** \$48  
**Champagne Brut Réserve (Best Buy)** This wine's fleshy Rainier cherry fatness is tightened up by dusty peach skin flavors and pale limestone scents. The fruit richness will make it a fine aperitif with poached prawns.

#### FLEURY

In 1901, Emile Fleury began reviving his family's vineyards in Courteron in the Côte des Bar, replanting the pinot noir that phylloxera had destroyed. In 1929, when grape prices plummeted, his son Robert began bottling wine. Jean-Pierre, the third generation, started to experiment with biodynamics in 1989, converting the estate's 37 acres of vines in 1992. Now his son Jean-Sébastien is in charge, holding to the family style of pinot-dominant, oak-fermented, long-aged Champagnes. As one taster put it, summing up the house style, "If Coche-Dury made Cham-

pagne, it would be like this." Salty, seashell minerality is a hallmark, along with power and grace. *Domaine Select Wine Estates, NY*

**93 | Fleury** \$100  
**2000 Champagne Extra Brut** Layered with umami richness, this wine's sophisticated flavors bring food to mind. Its yeasty maturity gives a mushroom note, like *huitlacoche*. The deep, meaty flavors have an intensity that parallels pork broth at a traditional ramen house. Herbal notes add freshness, as does the sparkle of the mousse. Its complexity demands a Burgundy glass, and roast partridge or other game to match.

**92 | Fleury** \$90  
**2005 Champagne Extra Brut Cépages Blancs** A powerful chardonnay Champagne from the Côte des Bar, this skates past notes of heirloom apples and macadamia nuts with a youthful assurance. Its broad, leesy flavors are held firm, so the wine, while juicy and rich in the middle, feels graceful.

#### RENE GEOFFROY

Founded in the 17th century, this estate is now run by Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy at his new gravity-fed winery in Ay. All of his production comes off the family's 34.6 acres of vines, which cover the warm slopes of Cumières, where red grapes thrive; Geoffroy's vines are nearly 80 percent pinot noir and meunier. He produces structured wines, with a vinous, red fruit character. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**90 | René Geoffroy** \$60  
**2006 Champagne Brut Empreinte 1er Cru (Best Buy)** This is predominantly made up of red grapes (76 percent pinot noir and 10 percent meunier), three quarters of it fermented in oak, half of it allowed to undergo malolactic. The oak shows clearly in the wine's structure, as does the pinot, adding an earthen weight to the wine, and substance to contrast the bubbles. It needs something as gamey as partridge to show its best.

#### PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS

The Gimonnet family has been growing grapes in the village of Cuis since 1750, and started bottling estate-grown Champagne in 1935. Didier Gimonnet oversees 68 acres of chardonnay and one acre of pinot noir, with a high percentage of the vines more than 30 years of age. A creamy style of Côte des Blancs Champagne, these wines are tied together by their citrus acidity. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**92 | Pierre Gimonnet & Fils** \$66  
**2006 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Cuvée Fleuron 1er Cru (Best Buy)** Chardonnay takes on a cool, almost red fruited ripeness in this wine. It's rich and substantial in the middle, with frank scents of peach skin, Mandarin orange and strawberries. Chalky acidity dries the finish, lasting on minerals and spice. Serve it with a rich fish, such as miso-glazed rock cod and *hon-shimeji* mushrooms.

**90 | Pierre Gimonnet & Fils** \$63  
**2008 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Cuvée Gastronom 1er Cru (Best Buy)** A rich style of Champagne designed with food in mind, this wine's fruit-driven sweetness tastes like peaches, while its warm spice lasts with a hint of cinnamon. It's clean and firm, a wine for braised veal.

#### MICHEL GONET

The Gonet family has produced Champagne under the family name for over seven generations, since founding the winery in 1802. In 1973, Michel Gonet updated and expanded the cellars, now run by his daughter Sophie Signolle. Her *cuvée* "The Nude" is made exclusively from the east-facing, 50- to 60-year-old chardonnay vines planted in Le Mesnil's chalky soils. *Golden Ram, NY*

**88 | Michel Gonet** \$68  
**2004 Champagne Blanc de Blancs Vieilles Vignes The Nude (Best Buy)** A golden wine with pale flavors of baked pear and Rainier cherries, this has a subtle richness, carrying its old-vine complexities on a light frame. It's mature and rounded by the sweetness of its fruit, lasting on pear flavor.

#### GONET-MÉDEVILLE

The husband-and-wife team of Xavier Gonet and Julie Gonet-Médeville (from Château Gilette in Sauternes) farms 30 acres of vines organically, their holdings spread throughout the premier crus Bisseuil, Mareuil-sur-Ay and Trepail and grand crus in Ambonnay and Le Mesnil-sur-Oger. Vinifying each plot separately, using minimal dosage and no malolactic fermentation, they make Champagnes that taste pure and vinous—dry wines for food. *Angel's Share Wines, Brooklyn, NY*

**91 | Gonet-Médeville** \$46  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Noirs 1er Cru (Best Buy)** This is 100 percent pinot noir, from 7.5 acres of chalk soils; a portion of the wine (30 percent) is vinified in old oak casks. Youthfully tense, even as it is generous and round, this wine's powerful structure doesn't

detract from its fine bubbles. The pinot comes across in scents of strawberries and cinnamon, a match for wood-roasted oysters.

**90 | Gonet-Médeville** \$49  
**Champagne Extra Brut Rosé 1er Cru (Best Buy)** Made from chardonnay (70 percent), pinot noir (27 percent) and a small addition of red wine, this rosé is vinified in old oak casks. That wood influence is apparent at first taste, accenting the wine's power and density. With air, red fruit arrives to fill out the broad, toasty structure. A match for toro sashimi.

**88 | Gonet-Médeville** \$39  
**Champagne Brut Tradition 1er Cru (Best Buy)** A country Champagne, this is less about finesse than vinous reality. Its sparkle carries spice, cutting through the round, lemon curd flavors, leaving a formidable wake for *pâté de foie gras*.

#### MARC HÉBRART

Marc Hébrart began bottling Champagne under his own name in 1963. His son Jean-Paul now farms the estate's 68 parcels, spread across 38.3 acres in the Vallée de la Marne. Pinot noir accounts for 75 percent of his vines, which average about 56 years of age. Hébrart vinifies each plot separately in stainless steel or ceramic tanks, and is experimenting with barrel fermentation and indigenous yeasts for the fruit of some of his older parcels. These are not powerful, reserve-infused wines. They taste like grower Champagne, vinous and delicious. *Terry Theise Selections/ Michael Skourak Wines, Spysset, NY*

**94 | Marc Hébrart** \$86  
**2008 Champagne Brut Special Club 1er Cru** This is ornate Champagne with no holds barred when it comes to textural richness. It's supple and succulent, with floral scents of jasmine and fresh cream. Notes of cider apple and oak add to the deep baritone flavor resonance. Built to cellar.

**93 | Marc Hébrart** \$56  
**Champagne Brut Rosé 1er Cru** Equal parts chardonnay and pinot noir, this gains its pink from nine percent still Mareuil pinot noir. That pink is relatively light, while the flavors are delicately but assertively red—strawberries and tart cherries—their sweetness circled by mouthwatering limestone minerality. It's an austere pinot that is somehow seductively delicious. Compellingly drinkable.

**92 | Marc Hébrart** \$54  
**Champagne Brut Sélection 1er Cru** The majority of this wine comes from the 2005

vintage, with 30 percent of the pinot noir from 2004. The blend splits 65 percent pinot noir to 35 percent chardonnay and melds in a wine that tastes completely real, the sweetness coming from the fruit rather than dosage. Its firm bubble and juicy apple flavors bristle against a limestone essence, a sense of pale perfection lasting as the wine dries out the mouth in wait of an oyster.

**90 | Marc Hébrart** \$48  
**Champagne Brut Cuvée de Réserve 1er Cru (Best Buy)** Mostly pinot noir, the majority of this wine is from 2007, the balance from '06 and '05. It feels substantial and meaty, with a smooth undercurrent of limestone, the wine's richness pricked with scents of heather and thistle. Pour it with roast veal.

#### CHARLES HEIDSIECK

In 1851, 29-year-old Charles Heidsieck purchased an underground network of 11th-century chalk cellars in Reims and began filling them with wine. These cellars remain the heart of the house, since 2011 part of French luxury brands company EPI (Société Européenne de Participations Industrielles). While Régis Camus remains the winemaking director, Thierry Roset, a 25-year veteran at Charles Heidsieck, took over as chef de cave in 2011. He's tightened the selection process for the Brut Réserve, whittling down the vineyard sources from 120 to 60 and raising the amount of reserve wine to 40 percent. Across the board, these wines show masterful winemaking and fine integration of all the elements. *Kony Comteau USA, NY*

**93 | Charles Heidsieck** \$125  
**1999 Champagne Brut Rosé** A transparent beauty from 1999, this rosé hums with red fruit. It layers red spices with wild mushroom scents, green fig and floral strawberries, maintaining clarity and freshness through its fine bubbles. The flavors are generous and bold, while held with tight-listed discretion. Pour this with roast arctic char and hen-of-the-woods mushrooms.

**92 | Charles Heidsieck** \$185  
**1995 Champagne Brut Blanc des Millénaires** Platinum gold in color, this wine is moving toward maturity with hazelnut flavors, touches of fresh almond and Sherry notes. Its scent of dried chamomile adds to the rich warmth. Chardonnay as an elder statesman.

**91 | Charles Heidsieck** \$100  
**2000 Champagne Brut** A zaffig 2000, this feels voluminous and heady with toasty

scents and mature complexity. The golden color and creamy integration of the bubbles suggest enjoying it now, with foie gras.

**90 | Charles Heidsieck** \$65  
**Champagne Brut Réserve** The reserve wines in this blend show in its richness and deep bass notes. It's a complex Champagne that holds its mature flavors with cleanliness and clarity, making it as refreshing as spring water. Scents of green apples and toasty legs add to the firm juiciness. For roast scallops.

**90 | Charles Heidsieck** \$80  
**Champagne Brut Rosé Réserve** With its deep, coppery pink color, this wine shows subtle refinement in its strawberry sweetness. Persimmon and almond flavors race into the finish, where the wine is completely dry, ghosting red fruit. A fine aperitif rosé.

#### KRUG

German immigrant Johann-Joseph Krug founded his company in 1843, developing a reputation for substantive, long-lived Champagnes. Under the stewardship of fifth-generation Henri and Rémi Krug, the firm built up their vineyard holdings to supply 40 percent of their annual production. Then, in preparation for their retirement, the brothers sold the firm to LVMH in 1999. The family remains active in the company, with Henri's son, Olivier, heading up the blending team, working with cellar master Eric Lebel, who has been with Krug since 1998. The house style includes fermenting all the base wines in oak barrels, creating rich, robust Champagnes that show best when served like still wines: in large glasses at the dinner table. *Moët Hennessy USA, NY*

**96 | Krug** \$299  
**Champagne Brut Rosé** The best bottle of Krug Rose we've tasted in some time, this is a glorious pinot noir, cloud-like in its raspberry and forest floor scents. It follows a chalk line of flavor, seamless and linear while the wine rolls and tumbles in precisely choreographed length. Delicate pink heaven in a glass.

**96 | Krug** \$249  
**2000 Champagne Brut** An immense 2000, this carries Krug's symphonic complexity into the confines of a single vintage. While the year created many broad, fat textured wines, this one adds muscle to that vintage character, reading as bold, juicy, serious and sexy. Its richness bristles with tension, tightening around the robust power of the wine as if to capture the sweetness of the earth. Extremely long, this will age with grace.

**95 | Krug** \$799  
**2000 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Clos du Mesnil** This is a challenging wine, a blond Valkyrie demanding attention, with enough complexity drawn from a single vintage and a single site to make the head spin. Is it oxidative in its note of caramel, or mineral in its earthen power? Almost absurdly tight for a 2000 Champagne—and intensely rich—this needs another ten years to relax.

**93 | Krug** \$169  
**Champagne Brut Grande Cuvée** Substantial, complex and heady, this current release of Grande Cuvée is in a constant state of change. Its flavors range from dark fruit to bright, sunny citrus, from nutty and pleasantly bitter to creamy and sweet. It carries electricity through the mineral resonance of its flavors. Masterfully blended.

**93 | Krug** \$529  
**1989 Champagne Brut Collection** A profound, well-aged Champagne, this is ready to drink right now. The bottle we tasted was at its best when first poured, feeling round with herbal notes against sweet nougat and hazelnut flavors. The oxidative notes run in harmony with the chalk line of flavor, “like catnip for lovers of old Champagne,” one taster commented, finishing the glass.

**JEAN LALLEMENT & FILS**  
 Alex Lallement makes just four wines totaling 1,700 cases from his 11-acre estate in the Montagne de Reims, with 80 percent of his vineyards in Verzenay and Verzy planted to pinot noir. Lallement ferments with ambient yeasts, encourages malolactic fermentation and does not filter or cold-stabilize. The wines are virile and structured, showing red fruit character and distinctive savory notes. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Yonkers, NY*

**92 | Jean Lallement et Fils** \$54  
**Champagne Brut Cuvée Réserve Verzenay Grand Cru** The current Réserve from Lallement is from the 2004 vintage, when his old-vine pinot noir parcels produced a wine that's rich and delicious. It's more about texture than overt flavor, feeling cool, supple, integrated, creamy. The only flavor in my notes is pistachio nougat though the wine is completely dry. It's more relevant to say that the wine is complex and irresistibly drinkable.

**LALLIER**  
 Founded in 1996 by James Lallier and purchased by Francis Tribaut in 2004, this Aÿ estate covers 123 acres of mostly grand cru

vineyards planted exclusively to pinot noir and chardonnay. Lallier vinifies parcels individually and uses only indigenous yeasts in vinification. The wines are rich and voluptuous, anything but lean. *Massanois Imports, Washington, DC*

**91 | Lallier** \$85  
**2005 Champagne Brut Grand Cru** This wine's richness needs time to develop with air, its long aging on the lees lending smokiness and then complexity as it opens in the glass. The flavors are creamy and roasty, their potential depths based on pinot noir from Aÿ (55 percent of the blend) and chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs.

**90 | Lallier** \$65  
**Champagne Brut Rosé 1er Cru** Mostly pinot noir (80 percent), this includes fruit from the Aÿ, Bouzy and Aÿs, all grand cru, as well as Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, a premier cru village, which, in the right conditions, can produce exceptional pinot noir. This one has clean red cherry and strawberry flavors that run straight through it, a little gamey, a little sprightly. It may develop more dimension with age, but even as a young wine it is suave and elegant.

**LAURENT-PERRIER**  
 After he founded his Champagne house in 1812, Alphonse Perlot handed it over to his cellar master, Eugene Laurent. Laurent's wife, Mathilde-Emilie Perrier, took control after his death in 1881, and added her name. The Nonancourt family purchased the house in 1939, and son Bernard de Nonancourt made it his life's work to take the Laurent-Perrier name global. His efforts are now continued by his two daughters, Alexandra and Stephanie, with cellar master Michel Fauconnet (only the house's third). *Laurent-Perrier, San Francisco, CA*

**90 | Laurent-Perrier** \$40  
**Champagne Demi-Sec (Best Buy)** A heady style of Champagne, this uses sweetness to bring up the fruit flavors, so it tastes like an off-dry riesling on limestone. The scents bring ginger and cider apple, while the finish is richer, with flavors of peaches and cream. It ends with enough acidity to match a fruit and cheese plate.

**LANSON**  
 Based in Reims—and boasting the sole remaining vineyard located within the city walls, the two-and-a-half-acre Clos de Lanson—this Champagne house was established in 1760 by a member of the Delamotte fam-

ily. In 1838, an employee, Jean-Baptiste Lanson, took over, trading under his own name. Today, cellar master Jean-Paul Gandon, who has been with the firm for 40 years, crafts the wine without allowing malolactic fermentation. *Lanson Int'l, Americas, NY*

**90 | Lanson** \$65  
**Champagne Brut Rosé Rose Label** There's a dark, umami richness to this wine, bringing to mind sautéed wild mushrooms and veal stock. There's also a flinty edge wiring it tight. Vinous and dry, this is built for rillettes.

**90 | Lanson** \$102  
**Champagne Brut Extra Age** This blend of pinot noir (60 percent) and chardonnay is aged a minimum of five years on the lees. The color of the wine is a delicate, light pink, and red fruit notes hold sway in its flavors—strawberry, tomato, red currant—all held tight in a complex layering with chalk. A distinctive style, this will benefit from further bottle age, or will soften up in the company of roast squab.

**88 | Lanson** \$50  
**Champagne Brut Black Label (Best Buy)** Flinty, smoky and roasty, this builds freshness from underneath the reductive notes, yielding floral lemon scents. It's round and balanced. For aperitifs.

**JACQUES LASSAIGNE**  
 Emmanuel Lassaigne is a chardonnay master, presiding over 11.5 acres of vines in Montgueux in the Aube. Even though the region is more frequently associated with pinot noir, Montgueux sits on a vein of limestone that runs straight up to Le Mesnil. Only six percent of his vineyards are in pinot noir; the rest are all chardonnay, most 35 years of age or older. He farms organically, although his vineyards are not certified, and vinifies each parcel separately, all in stainless steel except for La Colline Inspirée, which ferments in oak. Naked beauties, these are dry, mineral-driven wines that demand food. *Jenny & François Selections, NY*

**93 | Jacques Lassaigne** \$65  
**Champagne Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Les Vignes de Montgueux La Colline Inspirée** Prepare yourself for this with a dozen oysters at the ready—the tight acidity and limestone bitterness will need their juicy relief. Then, as the wine opens up, it gains its own supple textures, the flintlock of reduction and crunchy white fruit yielding to headier notes of white peach and forest mushrooms, all braided into the chalk.

**92 | Jacques Lassaigne** \$57  
**Champagne Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Les Vignes de Montgueux** There's nothing to get between you and the pure limestone captured in this wine, other than a touch of apple butter and creamy pear richness. This is pale, delicate, with just enough juiciness to defray the abrasion of the stone. If you like unmitigated Chablis, this is your Champagne.

**91 | Jacques Lassaigne** \$79  
**Champagne Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Les Vignes de Montgueux Le Cotet** From 40-year-old vines on a chalky hillside, this single-vineyard wine is fuller and richer than the Blanc de Blancs (above), showing more of its malolactic creaminess and autolytic development. It's round with pale fruit, white chalk and oyster mushroom flavors, finishing clean and dry. Serve this alongside halibut poached in dash.

#### JEAN LAURENT

Jean Laurent crafts his wine in the village of Celles-sur-Ouche, within the greater appellation of Aube, where his family laid down roots generations earlier. His wines are fashioned solely from his 39 acres of vines, 30 of which are planted to pinot noir and the rest to chardonnay. All are aged at least three years on the lees, typically blended from three vintages. *Hand Picked Selections, Warrenton, VA*

**93 | Jean Laurent** \$105  
**2002 Champagne Brut Blanc de Noirs** Elegance and flavor intensity combine in this remarkably youthful 2002. It's a Hall Mary pass of red fruit flavor, spinning cherry essence with limestone minerality, assertively rich in the middle, then clean, pale and roasty in the end. It leaves an impression of delicacy, even in the context of the vintage's power. Catch a bottle and store it in the cellar.

**90 | Jean Laurent** \$60  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Noirs** There's a seashell-like minerality to the scent of this wine, and a cool, dark cavern feel to its flavors. It's tight and dry, with fleshy lemon citrus notes firming up the finish. This is 100 percent pinot noir, selected and blended from three vintages. Serve it with poached salmon for brunch.

#### MARIE-NOËLLE LEDRU

Marie-Noëlle Ledru took over her family's Ambonnay-based winery in 1984, working her 15 acres organically. She's since given

up some of that land, working now with just five acres of 40-year-old vines. Everything in the winery is done by hand, and the wines are vinified in stainless steel or enameled steel, without any filtering or cold stabilization. She allows for malolactic and keeps the wines on their lees for three to five years, putting out compelling pinot-focused wines with depth and precision. *Bouthomie Wine Imports, South Orange, NJ*

**92 | Marie-Noëlle Ledru** \$63  
**Champagne Extra Brut Grand Cru** It's clear in the scents and the flavors of this wine that the fruit was grown and handled with care. It feels brisk and plump, saturated with the essence of red fruit flavor on a narrow frame, completely dry to the point of being gingery yet also harmonious and mouth-filling. All of those seeming contradictions are not at all contradictory when you taste and drink it, a clean, youthful and beautifully expressive Champagne.

#### A. MARGAINE

Arnaud Margaine is the fourth generation to run his family estate, with 15.3 acres of vines in the premier cru village of Villers-Marmery. Chardonnay claims 90 percent of his vineyards, an anomaly in the predominantly pinot noir region of Montagne de Reims. He vinifies partially in oak and blocks malolactic to preserve freshness, producing fruity, full-bodied wines. *Ferry Thèse Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**86 | A. Margaine** \$48  
**Champagne Brut 1er Cru (Best Buy)** This wine's powerful acidity masks what flavor development might show with further bottle age. For now, it's tight and firm, the radish-like feel of the acidity needing a plate of oysters or clams.

#### PIERRE MONCUIT

With a family history in Le Mesnil sur Oger since the late 19th century, Pierre Moncuit started bottling his own wine in the 1950s. In 1977, his daughter Nikole took control of the viticulture and vinification of the family vineyards, of which 37 acres are located in the grand cru commune of Mesnil-sur-Oger, with 12 more in the village of Sézanne. Her brother, Yves, runs the business side of the company, while her daughter, Valérie, recently joined the team. The wines undergo full malolactic fermentation in stainless steel tanks and are produced each year from a single vintage. They radiate the pale intensity of chardonnay grown in limestone. *Polaris Selections, Mount Kisco, NY*

**94 | Pierre Moncuit** \$43  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Hugues de Coulmet (Best Buy)** From the Côte de Sézanne, this wine is essentially a single vintage (in this case, 2010). It's immediately bold and fragrant, with hints of strawberries and green apple over a layer cake of chalk. The purity of the wine is compelling, with scents of fossilized oyster shells that could make it seem like a fine Chablis with bubbles. Vinous and rich, this performs far beyond its price. Grab a case for the holidays.

**92 | Pierre Moncuit** \$50  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Cuvée Pierre Moncuit-Delos Grand Cru (Best Buy)** From old vines in Le Mesnil, this wine's scents of creamery butter lend luscious richness, but those malolactic notes only add to the length of flavor, without masking its precision. This chardonnay has a grand pallor, almost goth in its truffle-like earthiness and the feminine delicacy of its mousse.

#### FRANCK PASCAL

Franck Pascal started working at his family's Marne Valley estate in 1994; he and his wife, Isabelle, have since pieced together almost 10 acres spread among 20 parcels in five villages. More than 70 percent of the vines are pinot meunier, and another 20 percent are pinot noir, with the remaining acreage in chardonnay. His vineyards have been certified organic since 2005, and he now works biodynamically. He prefers to use very little sulfur and low dosages (listing dosage levels as well as disgorgement dates on the back labels), making firm wines that need air to open up. They share a subtle perfumed character and sophisticated structure. *Louis Dressner Selections, NY*

**92 | Franck Pascal** \$65  
**Champagne Brut Rosé Tolérance** Pascal produces still red wine from his low-yielding parcels of pinot noir and pinot meunier. It accounts for six percent of this blend, providing the color as well as deepening the aroma to rosemary and rose petal. The wine smells subtly of lime and soil, and it tastes clean and fresh. A sophisticated Champagne, one that will benefit from decanting or cellar time.

**90 | Franck Pascal** \$55  
**Champagne Brut Nature Reliance** Made almost completely from red grapes, this is predominantly pinot meunier, presented as a brisk wine with fresh strawberry and black pepper notes. There's persistent acidity to carry the flavors, which feel open and clean, finishing with an elastic snap.

**90 Franck Pascal** \$85  
**2004 Champagne Extra Brut Quintes-**  
**sence** The most perfumed of Pascal's wines,  
 this bottle also had the most powerful  
 mousse. All the bubbles lift a creamy, full-  
 bodied, austere dry Champagne. The fla-  
 vors are toasty, scented with white fruit and  
 pale earth. A firm wine that will benefit from  
 further aging.

#### PEHU-SIMONET

David Pehu is the fourth generation of his  
 family to produce estate-bottled Cham-  
 pagnes. Based in Verzenay, he makes grand  
 cru wines from 22.2 acres in Verzy, Sillery,  
 Mailly, Le Mesnil-sur-Oger. He earned Eco-  
 cert organic certification in 2011 and has  
 begun ageing some of the wines in oak  
 barrels coopered from local forests. Pre-  
 dominantly pinot noir, the wines rarely go  
 through malolactic, and exhibit a vibrancy  
 and firm structure that tends to reward time  
 in the cellar. *Terry Theise Selections/Michael*  
*Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**91 | Pehu-Simonet** \$64  
**Champagne Brut Rosé Grand Cru** This  
 gains its pink color from ten percent still  
 pinot noir, grown in Verzenay, fermented  
 and aged in oak, then blended with 70 per-  
 cent pinot noir and 30 percent chardonnay.  
 It's the least flamboyant of the Pehu wines we  
 tasted, with subtle strawberry sweetness and  
 rose petal scents. It finishes with woodland  
 freshness. Delicious with duck.

**90 | Pehu-Simonet** \$51  
**Champagne Brut Selection Grand Cru**  
 Sweet strawberry flavors of pinot noir infuse  
 this round and supple Champagne. The  
 mousse is finely integrated, pointing up the  
 floral notes in the wine. A chic bubbly show-  
 ing its youth, this is mostly from the 2010  
 vintage.

#### PERRIER-JOUËT

Hervé Deschamps has been working at  
 Perrier-Jouët since 1983; ten years later, he  
 became the house's seventh cellar master in  
 its 200-year history. He works with a combi-  
 nation of purchased grapes and fruit off the  
 firm's 161 acres of land, much of that in the  
 Côte des Blancs. Chardonnay plays a large  
 part in the house style, with 50 percent of  
 the flagship Belle Epoque coming from Cra-  
 mant, Avize and Chouilly. *Period Ricard*  
*USA, Purchase, NY*



**91 Perrier-Jouët** \$150  
**2006 Champagne Brut Belle Epoque**  
 There's some youthful reduction to this  
 Champagne, hinting at flint and spring leeks.  
 Tight and earthy rather than sunny, it has  
 layers of flavor that build out of that flinty  
 tension, yielding scents of cranberry and  
 ripe red fruit. A lean vintage of this prestige  
 cuvée, it needs a year or two of bottle age to  
 evolve more fully.

#### PIERRE PETERS

Founded in 1919, this 45.7-acre estate is  
 run by fourth-generation Rodolphe Peters,  
 grandson of Pierre. He owns parcels in sev-  
 eral Côte des Blancs villages, with the major-  
 ity of his vines in the grand cru village of Le  
 Mesnil-sur-Oger. The wines have racy acid-  
 ity and a prominent chalkiness founded by  
 malolactic fermentation. *Terry Theise Sele-*  
*tions/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY*

**91 | Pierre Pétters** \$61  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs Cuvée**  
**de Réserve Grand Cru** This wine's vigor-  
 ous bubbles carry fresh scents of apples and  
 green pear. It's dry and crisp, infused with  
 a quinine-like minerality that lasts with the  
 fruit. A wine of breed and refinement, this  
 needs only time to show its multidimen-  
 sional charms.

#### PIPER-HEIDSIECK

Florens-Louis Heidsieck founded this com-  
 pany in 1785 and the house remained in his  
 family until 1988, when the Heriard Dubreuil  
 family took over. In 2011, the Descours fam-  
 ily of EPI took over the reins, with Christo-  
 pher Descours running it today. The house  
 pulls grapes from some 100 crus, the wines  
 made by Régis Camus, who started as cellar  
 master in 1994. His 2002 Rare is stunning,  
 one of the top Champagnes we tasted this  
 year. *Rony Cointreau USA, NY*

**95 Piper-Heidsieck** \$175  
**2002 Champagne Rare** This is a blend from  
 17 crus in the Montagne de Reims, 70 per-  
 cent chardonnay, 30 percent pinot noir. It  
 is, by far, the best Piper Rare we've tasted in  
 recent memory. Dressed as the bottle is in  
 filigreed gold that might serve as the tiara for  
 a princess, the wine is more animal, taking

chardonnay into a fine mist, like the scent of  
 sweat off that princess. Yes, I was completely  
 seduced by this 2002, by its complex scent  
 of plum and ginger, mushroom and root; by  
 the silken elegance of its bubbles; by the way  
 it shimmers into the distance as its flavors  
 slowly recede. Harmonious and accessible,  
 in fact, delicious to drink now, this has the  
 structure to hold tight for several years in  
 the cellar.

**91 Piper-Heidsieck** \$75  
**2006 Champagne Brut (Best Buy)** Régis  
 Camus found the pinot noir of 2006 partic-  
 ularly intense, so he increased the propor-  
 tion of chardonnay in this blend, achieving  
 a wine of depth and multidimensional fla-  
 vor. There's youthful tightness and austerity,  
 focused in on lime pith (and, perhaps, a little  
 banana pith), developing richer, juicier notes  
 of pear as it opens.

#### POL ROGER

Pol Roger starting selling wine in his home-  
 town of Ay in 1849. Today, the house he built  
 remains in family hands, with fifth genera-  
 tion descendant Hubert de Billy on the exec-  
 utive board and his sister Evelyne working as  
 vineyard manager. She oversees 225 acres,  
 which provide 55 percent of the house's pro-  
 duction. In the cellars, Dominique Petit has  
 been in charge since 1999, after working 24  
 years at Krug. He's since completed a renova-  
 tion of the facilities, replacing every tank and  
 adding enough small ones to allow him to  
 vinify each parcel separately. He encourages  
 malolactic, and keeps the wines on the lees in  
 cold cellars for around ten years before dis-  
 gorging. These are powerful wines, focusing  
 on chardonnay flavors and pale limestone  
 minerality. *Frederick Wildman and Sons, NY*



**93 | Pol Roger** \$135  
**2002 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs**  
**Extra Cuvée de Réserve** Blended from  
 grand cru vineyards in the Côte des Blancs,  
 this chardonnay cold ferments in stainless  
 steel and undergoes malolactic prior to aging  
 on the lees for nine years in bottle. It's the  
 most classic of Pol Roger's current lineup,  
 packing the tension of the vintage into  
 mouthwatering flavors of heirloom apples  
 and pale limestone. Sunny energy seems to

come out of that earthy side of the wine, bristling with youthful power. This has years of development ahead.

**91 Pol Roger** \$110  
**2002 Champagne Brut Extra Cuvée de Réserve** An emphasis on pinot noir over chardonnay (60/40 in the blend) gives this wine a deeper, denser feel than the '02 Blanc de Blancs. It comes from 20 grand and premier cru vineyards in the Montagne de Reims and Côte des Blancs. There's a scent of yellow roses leading into flavors of peach pit and limestone, minerally in the middle and then softer and pleasantly sweet in the end. Approachable now, this will continue to develop with bottle age.

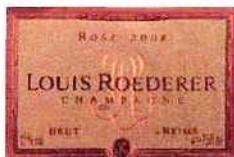
**89 Pol Roger** \$50  
**Champagne Brut Extra Cuvée de Réserve (Best Buy)** Richer and sweeter than the Pure Extra Brut, this wine is rounded by dosage, lending it broader appeal. The scent is cedary and smoky, the flavors satisfying and complete.

#### LOUIS ROEDERER

Family-owned since its inception, Roederer was founded in 1776 and is today run by Frédéric Rouzaud, Louis Roederer's sixth-generation descendant. The original Roederer was a negotiant with the foresight to invest in vineyards. The firm now farms 560 acres of vines in the Côte des Blancs, Montagne de Reims and Vallée de la Marne; their vineyard team cultivates 148 of those acres under biodynamic practices. *Chef de cave* Jean-Baptiste Lecaillon directs both the viticulture and winemaking, selecting estate fruit for the vintage wines and vinifying each plot separately. Malolactic fermentation is blocked for all vintage wines, with the goal of maintaining firm structures for long aging. Our top-scoring wine from the portfolio this year is the Cristal Rosé—a saignée style developed by Frédéric's father, Jean-Claude Rouzaud, in 1974, and a wine that inspired a newly constructed cellar dedicated to rose production. As with all the Roederer vintage wines, the dosage is relatively low, allowing a savory complexity to develop with age. *Maisons Marques & Domains USA, Oakland, CA*

**98 Louis Roederer** \$468  
**2004 Champagne Brut Cristal Rosé** Few of the noble wines of the world have the effortless grace of Cristal Rosé. The pinot noir for the blend, planted in the 1960s, grows in the center of the slope in Aÿ. Its flavors are more focused on the soil than fruit, as if the vines are bent on extracting the scent of fossil

ized seashells from the limestone their roots explore. Jean-Baptiste Lecaillon blends the pinot noir with 40 percent chardonnay from Aÿze, creating a wine with flavors that reach the horizon line, and an ethereal fragrance that lasts for minutes after each taste, bright, weightless, elusive and grand.



**95 Louis Roederer** \$79  
**2008 Champagne Brut Rosé** This is the first vintage released from the new cellar Roederer built in 2007, dedicated to the production of rose. It comes from the firm's estate vineyard in Cumières. With the delicate color of a classic saignée Champagne, this has the powerful expression of a grand cru wine, performing beyond its premier cru status. The fragrant red fruit has rich succulence and a chalky undertone, along with a fierce acidity that needs time to temper in the bottle. Decant it if you open this now, to serve with *mousse truffée*.

**94 Louis Roederer** \$72  
**2006 Champagne Brut** A polished Champagne, classic in its presentation of red fruit and chalk, all held in perfect balance, this is brisk, elegant, tightly structured, a savory 2006 that will age with grace for ten years or longer.

**90 Louis Roederer** \$85  
**2007 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs** Fragrant with green lime and heirloom apple scents, this is a vintage powered by acidity. Its tart citrus flavors develop delicacy and grace as they open with air. Youthfully tight, this needs several years in bottle to show its best.

**88 Louis Roederer** \$52  
**Champagne Brut Premier (Best Buy)** A simple, clean Champagne, this has a firm mousse and refreshingly tart acidity to balance its sweet vanilla scent. For aperitifs.

#### RUINART

Named for the Benedictine monk and uncle of the founder—Dom Thierry Ruinart—this house was established in 1729 and is now owned by LVMH. Cellar master Frédéric Panaïotis works from a base of chardonnay grown primarily on the northern slopes of Montagne de Reims, along with

fruit from the Côte des Blancs. Panaïotis ages his cuvées in Ruinart's deep chalk cellars—*les crayères*—excavated by the Romans around 50 BCE underneath the city of Reims. He sources fruit for his age-worthy vintage selections exclusively from grand cru vineyards. *Moët Hennessy USA, NY*

**95 Dom Ruinart** \$130  
**2002 Champagne Brut** Taking the masculine power of the 2002 vintage and running with it, this comes across as massive and powerful, all of its swagger suspended by a team of needling bubbles. Oak furthers the structural intensity, as does an almost tannic leanness, wrapped in flavors that range from vanilla custard to fresh macadamia nut. The final impression is sumptuous, tasting enough like wild mushrooms and lobster to match a dish combining the two. For now, it's best left to rest in the cellar.

**93 Ruinart** \$75  
**Champagne Brut Rosé** This deep pink rose starts off from a delicate scent of spice and roses, strawberries and the freshly turned earth of a garden. It grows more powerful and grand with air, building fresh raspberry pinot vinosity, a fragrant essence of limestone and fruit that lasts.

**92 Ruinart** \$65  
**Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs** If chardonnay could be a red wine, it might have the red fruit flavors of this blanc de blancs. Perhaps it's the floral aspects that turn its chamomile and yellow flower notes toward violets, or the deep earth tones adding color to the flavor. The fruit is persistent, sunny in the middle, then shaded by an almost tannic character to the lees that places the wine with food, particularly roast veal.

**91 Dom Ruinart** \$250  
**1998 Champagne Brut Rosé** This is heady and earthier than the nonvintage rose, its warm complexity carrying scents of red fruits and orange candies. A powerful wine, this needs something equally rich—one taster suggested grouse with a wild berry sauce.

#### SALON

The 1999 vintage was the thirty-seventh in the 20th century for Salon—a house whose first vintage was 1905. Eugene-Aimé Salon limited his production to estate-grown chardonnay in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, hand-picked and hand-sorted. His intent from the start was to make wine only in the best vintages, using only the juice of the first pressing. Cellared for about ten years before release,

Salon's wines are famed for their longevity. *Vineyard Brands, Birmingham, AL*



**96 | Salon** \$369  
**1999 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs** As it turns 15, this wine still has youthful notes of chamomile and meadow flowers. Its flavor intensity, a force of nature pitting those vibrant, sunny floral notes against a resonant limestone earth tone, is something that could only have been achieved through all those years in bottle. While the mousse is persistent and as fine as a mist, the flavors are vinous, suggesting you serve this wine as you would a Corton-Charlemagne: with something equally luscious and rich, like seared sea scallops over truffled mashed potatoes.

#### FRANÇOIS SECONDE

François Secondé established his estate in Sillery in the Montagne de Reims in 1976, working with his wife, Anne-Marie. They farm 12 acres of grand cru vineyards, two-thirds in pinot noir and the rest in chardonnay, the vines averaging 37 years old. The wines are vinified largely in wood and allowed to go through malolactic fermentation. Secondé also has a light hand with dosage, and his wines tend toward the drier, crisper end of the Brut spectrum. *AP Wine Imports, NY*

**90 | François Secondé** \$70  
**Champagne Brut Grand Cru Clavier** This blend is two-thirds chardonnay, one-third pinot noir; it includes ten percent reserve wines. Grown in Sillery, it is super-mineral in character, smelling and tasting like a sparkling Chablis. The chardonnay brings a youthfully green acidity that makes the wine mouthwatering. For oysters.

#### TAITTINGER

Founded by Pierre-Charles Taittinger in 1931, this house has amassed an estate of 752 acres of vines spread among 34 vineyards—most in the Côte des Blancs. The fruit from these vineyards makes up about half of the firm's production, a range of cuvées that reflects the strength of their chardonnay holdings,

which make up 37 percent of their vineyards. Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger, the president of the firm and grandson of the house's founder works with *chef du cave* Loïc Dupont. Their prestige cuvée, Comtes de Champagne, is produced only in top years; since 1952, there have been only 30 vintages produced. *Kobrand, Purchase, NY*

**93 | Taittinger** \$220  
**2005 Champagne Rosé Comtes de Champagne** Delicate red fruit scents fill this clean, elegant rosé, its tart strawberry flavors lasting, harmonious, glowing with light fruit sweetness. With its freshness and refinement, this is a mouthwatering match for seared duck breast or roast squab.

**93 | Taittinger** \$175  
**2005 Champagne Blanc de Blancs Comtes de Champagne** A flashy, stylish blanc de blancs, this has exotic, dark tones to its mature fruit and toasty lees. Severe at first, like a brooding supermodel, this relents with air and gives a little plumpness, sharing some of its riches in a supple, elegant texture. With its heady complexity, this is a Champagne to serve with blini and smoked salmon.

**88 | Taittinger** \$50  
**Champagne Brut La Française (Best Buy)** Broad and leesy, this wine's flavors layer that autolytic character with scents of lemongrass, green fig and pineapple. A creamy, ripe style, this finishes open and clean.

#### VEUVE CLICQUOT PONSARDIN

The namesake of the house, Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin, took over the family business in 1805 after the sudden death of François Clicquot, her husband and the son of the original founder. The "grande dame" soon built an international market for her firm's Champagne, particularly in Russia, and is credited with introducing new cellar techniques, such as the practice of riddling. The extensive Clicquot domaine provides estate fruit for all of the vintage wines. The firm is now owned by LVMH, the wines made by cellar master Dominique Demarville, who ferments in stainless steel and allows full malolactic to occur. *Moët Hennessy USA, NY*

**93 | Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin** \$160  
**2004 Champagne Brut La Grande Dame** A cool, youthfully rich 2004, this starts from an austere place and grows increasingly expressive as it opens in the glass. Complex depths of flavor develop out of a white fruit note,

layering chalk and lime-citrus notes with cedar and pale smoke. Approachable now with enough air, this will develop beautifully over the next ten years.

**90 | Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin** \$69  
**Champagne Brut Rosé** A whimsical play on fruit and spice, this is delicate enough to hint at an orange blossom scent and meaty enough to serve with cured sausages. It bristles with acidity over red fruit, lasting on heady complexity.

#### VOUETTE & SORBÉE

Bertrand Gautherot's family has farmed vines since 1918, but Gautherot didn't start to make wines from his Côte des Bar vineyards until 2001, three years after he had them certified biodynamic. His 12 acres of chardonnay and pinot noir grow on a vein of Kimmeridgian marl and Portlandian limestone—the same rock that's under Chablis, just 37 miles away. After harvest, Gautherot lets the juice spontaneously ferment in oak barriques, where it stays until malolactic is finished the following spring. The Blanc d'Argile is 100 percent chardonnay; the Fidèle is all pinot noir. With very little reserve wine in the blends, little sulfur and no dosage, these are uncompromising wines, powerful and savory, worthy of decanting and pouring into big-bowled glasses to savor their complexity. *Domaine Select Wine Estates, NY*

**96 | Vouette & Sorbée** \$120  
**Champagne Extra Brut Blanc d'Argile** This chardonnay Champagne is fermented in 400-liter barrels, where it rests until spring when malolactic is complete. The microflora have their way with the wine, giving the impression of limestone soil in full bloom. It has the scent of just-picked fruit, the fragrance of an apple at peak autumn ripeness. The broad richness of the wine is held in check by freshness, which keeps it tense and extends the flavors for minutes.

**94 | Vouette & Sorbée** \$95  
**Champagne Extra Brut Fidèle** Made from pinot noir, this is a bone-dry Champagne that's fragrant with red apple and savory almond complexity, like marzipan without the sweetness. Finely integrated, this is supple and powerful in its complexity, deliciously earthy and ethereal. ■