



The International Wine Review

No.
78

JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 2020

iwinereview.com AVAILABLE ONLINE ONLY

PRICE \$25

Champagne: Diversity and Change

Changing Climate

Côte des Bar

Pinot Meunier

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Introduction | |
| Invention of Champagne | |
| The Champagne Vineyard | |
| The Grapes of Champagne | |
| The Producers: Houses, Growers, and Cooperatives | |
| Making Champagne: From the Vineyard to Disgorgement | |
| Styles of Champagne | |
| Champagne and Food | |
| The Market for Champagne | |
| Producer Profiles and Tasting Notes | |
| Annexes | |
| 1. Map of Champagne | |
| 2. Viticulture in Champagne | |
| 3. The Méthode Champenoise | |
| 4. Vintages | |

Introduction

Diversity and change have been a constant in Champagne ever since grapes have been grown there. In this our third report on Champagne, our objective is to inform readers of Champagne's diversity and the many important changes which have been taking place in the region and the impact of these changes on the wines. The most significant changes in Champagne by far have occurred in response to global warming. As we note in the report, over the last 30 years, climate change in the region has led to earlier harvests, riper fruit, lower acidity and reduced the need for high levels of dosage

Acknowledgements.

We owe a debt of gratitude to many people and organizations for their contributions to this report. First and foremost, we thank Maria E. Denton, Beverage Director at The Hamilton and Old Ebbitt Grill in Washington DC, for sharing her time, knowledge and tasting talents; she is a major contributor to this report. We also thank the many importers, distributors and Champagne wineries, too numerous to mention here, that provided samples to us. Thanks also to the Old Ebbitt Grill for hosting a Champagne and oysters tasting and to the Blue Duck Tavern for hosting a spectacular gourmet food and luxury cuvée tasting. This is the third, comprehensive report we've issued on Champagne along with many articles and Champagne reviews that were an important resource for producing this report. However, we are also grateful to the authors of two recently published books that helped inform this report: Peter Liem (Champagne) and Tom Stevenson and Essi Avellan (Champagne & Sparkling Wine). Finally, we thank the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC) for the photographs and other resources they provided for this report.

in Champagne. Moreover, increased environmental awareness has led progressive growers to adopt organic, biodynamic, and sustainable viticulture practices.

We also note that winemaking has been changing with increased use of natural yeasts and a variety of fermentation vessels and methods, from reductive winemaking using stainless steel to oxidative practices using oak barrels and even the occasional amphora or cement egg. The report explores how the introduction of new winemaking methods affect Champagne, and we provide details about the practices of each producer in the winery profiles and tasting notes. The report provides in-depth tasting notes and ratings for 250 Champagnes on the market.



The Meunier Grape

Another significant change in Champagne has been the growing numbers of bottlings that are vineyard designated or sourced from single villages or crus. And, many stunning Champagnes are now being made in lesser known growing regions like the western end of the Marne Valley and the Côte des Bar, regions not familiar to many Champagne enthusiasts. In view of the

The i-winereview.com is published by the International Wine Review, LLC. Our office is located at 6625 Old Chesterbrook Road, McLean, VA 22101. Our email is: info@iwinereview.com Rates for individual online subscriptions are \$89 annually. Commercial online subscriptions for wine companies and member of the wine trade are \$149 annually. Subscriptions include exclusive access to all online resources of i-winereview.com. Contact us about eligibility and rates. Subscriptions may be purchased online at www.i-winereview.com Individual reports are also available for \$25. Reproduction of the material contained herein, including copying, without written permission is prohibited by law. Media, wine importers, distributors and retailers may use brief portions of this material in its original form if attributed to the International Wine Review.

bewildering diversity of Champagnes now available to consumers, our report examines each growing region in depth and identifies some of the top producers making Champagnes that are specific to a cru or vineyard parcel. We also explore the different grape varieties with special emphasis on Meunier, which until recently was hidden in the blends of the Champagne houses. Meunier is finally passing out of its Rodney Dangerfield (can't get no respect) phase.

Ever since the English first put bubbles in Champagne, it has been associated with celebration and festive times. It has been less frequently viewed as a wine to accompany food. However, with its high acidity and lively effervescence, Champagne is a wonderful food wine, and the diversity of Champagne styles means it can accompany a wide variety of foods. In preparing the report, we did several Champagne and food pairings to more fully explore this theme, and we write about it in a special section of this report.

America has had a long love affair with Champagne, beginning with Thomas Jefferson's travels to the region and serving Champagne at the White House and at Monticello. American consumption of Champagne began increasing rapidly in the mid-20th century, mostly from well-known Champagne houses, a pattern that persists today. But this, too, is changing as importers began to bring in distinctive Champagnes from new producers and new regions. Today, the American consumer of Champagne can find increasingly diverse offerings as well as many outstanding values. As the report confirms, there are many excellent and affordable Champagnes available to the US consumer today, including a large number of grower-producer Champagnes.

The Invention of Champagne

Historically, up until the 17th century, the wines of Champagne were still wines, mostly light red wines made from varieties like Morillon Noir and Gouais Noir, predecessors of today's most popular varieties. These wines were some of the most famous of France and were frequently served at the royal coronations held in Reims. By the middle of the 17th century winemakers were making *vin gris*, a white wine from red grapes, a significant improvement over the acidic white wines made previously.

England was an important export market for *vin gris* and other Champagne wines, and, surprisingly, this led to the invention of sparkling Champagne in England, not France. With the onset of winter temperatures, fermentation of Champagne was routinely halted prior to complete dryness, and the wine was shipped in cask to England where it was bottled. As temperatures began to

rise in the spring, it would often begin to re-ferment, or go through malolactic fermentation, in the bottle, resulting in a spritzy wine. The problem was that the glass being produced during this period, both in England and France, was too weak to withstand the pressure exerted by the release of carbon dioxide. More than 2 or 3 bars of pressure would easily break the bottles being produced. As a result, much of what was shipped and bottled outside of the Champagne region frequently resulted in an explosion.

The turning point in the history of Champagne was the development of stronger glass in England. It was a twist of fate that led to the development of stronger glass bottles. In an effort to protect the forests in England, King James I issued a royal decree prohibiting wood fueled furnaces. This quickly led to the transition to charcoal, which achieves higher, hotter temperatures. The result: glass produced in England became much stronger and capable of holding the mounting pressure resulting from a secondary fermentation in bottle. Glass being produced in France, which relied on fires fueled with wood, was weaker and could not contain the pressure exerted by sparkling wines.

Thus, sparkling Champagne arrived in England before it did in France. The process of Champagne production was first documented by Christopher Merret in England in 1662¹. He referred to the addition of sugar and molasses to "all sorts of wines to make them drink brisk and sparkling". This occurred nearly 20 years before Dom Perignon arrived at the abbey in Hautvillers, and before the mention of the process in any French literature.



Dom Perignon Born in 1639 in Champagne, Pierre Pérignon studied at the Jesuit college Châlons-sur-Marne and then entered the Benedictine order and in 1668 was named cellar master at the abbey of Hautvillers. He made important contributions to growing better grapes and making higher quality wine. One of those contributions, as relayed

by his pupil Frère Pierre, was how to blend wine from different terroirs to make a better balanced wine, a principal followed by the important Champagne houses to this day². But Dom Perignon didn't invent sparkling Champagne, and the myth that he did so is most likely the product of an early public relations campaign. Shown here: Tasting Dom Perignon from our visit to the abbey of Hautvillers.

¹ Christopher Merret (1662) *Some Observations Concerning the Ordering of Wines*, the Royal Society.

² Frère Pierre (1724) *Traité de la culture des vignes de Champagne*.

Previous Wine Reports

Issues 1-15 are available at www.iwinereview.com

| | |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Issue 16 | Oregon Pinot Noir |
| Issue 17 | Sauvignon of the Loire |
| Issue 18 | Wines of Navarra |
| Issue 19 | Wines of Greece: Assyrtiko and Santorini |
| Issue 20 | The Santa Lucia Highlands |
| Issue 21 | The Chilean Wine Revolution |
| Issue 22 | Grapes and Wines of the Western Loire |
| Issue 23 | Ribera del Duero Revisited |
| Issue 24 | The New Wines of Portugal Double Issue |
| Issue 25 | The Wines of Austria |
| Issue 26 | The Diverse Wines of Argentina Double Issue |
| Issue 27 | Sweet and Dessert Wines of the World |
| Issue 28 | The Wines of Priorat |
| Issue 29 | The Wines of Monterey County |
| Issue 30 | The Wines of South Africa Double Issue |
| Issue 31 | Brunello di Montalcino |
| Issue 32 | The New Wines of Israel |
| Issue 33 | The Wines of Paso Robles |
| Issue 34 | Champagne Revisited |
| Issue 35 | The Wines of Soave |
| Special Report | South African Chenin Blanc |
| Issue 36 | The Wines of Santa Barbara |
| Issue 37 | The Wines of Sicily |
| Issue 38 | The Wines of Washington State |
| Issue 39 | The World of Grenache |
| Special Report | The Wines of Montefalco |
| Issue 40 | Rosé Champagne and Sparkling Wine |
| Special Report | The Exciting Sparkling Wines of South Africa |
| Issue 41 | The Amarones of Valpolicella |
| Issue 42 | The Wines of Catalonia |
| Issue 43 | The Wines of Rioja—A New Look |
| Issue 44 | The Wines of Sonoma County |
| Issue 45 | Virginia Wine Comes of Age |
| Issue 46 | Special Report: The Best of Soave |
| Issue 47 | Special Report: The Best of Tuscany |
| Issue 48 | The Wines of Los Carneros |
| Issue 49 | Special Report: The Best of Spain |
| Issue 50 | The Wines of Chablis |
| Issue 51 | Special Report: Best Indigenous Wines of Sicily |
| Issue 52 | Special Report: The Best of Sherry |
| Issue 53 | American Sparkling Wine |
| Issue 54 | The Wines of Mount Veeder |
| Issue 55 | Wines of South Africa: White Blends and Old Vines |
| Issue 56 | Chianti Classico: Exciting Times |
| Issue 57 | Tannat and Other Wines of Uruguay |
| Issue 58 | Beaujolais in Transition |
| Issue 59 | Wines of the Piedmont: Roero |
| Issue 60 | Chile's Premium Wine Revolution |
| Issue 61 | California Zinfandel: A New Look |
| Issue 62 | Paso Robles: Cabernet Sauvignon & Other Bordeaux Varieties |
| Issue 63 | The Wines of Friuli: Collio's Elegant Whites |
| Issue 64 | Selections for the New Year: The Best Wines Tasted in 2017 |
| Issue 65 | The Vines and Wines of Lodi |
| Issue 66 | The World of Rosé |
| Issue 67 | The Wines of Bulgaria |
| Issue 68 | Austrian Wine: Diverse Terroir, Exceptional Quality |
| Issue 69 | The Wines of the Finger Lakes |
| Issue 70 | The Rocks District: America's Unique Terroir |
| Issue 71 | Washington State Revisited |
| Issue 72 | The Wines of Maryland |
| Issue 73 | The Wines of New Jersey |
| Issue 74 | Pennsylvania Wine: Fifty Years of Progress |
| Issue 75 | Virginia Wine: Moving Forward |
| Issue 77 | The Wines of North Carolina |



These reports are available online at www.iwinereview.com