

Worksheet Ten

SWEETNESS, ACIDITY AND BALANCE

Champagnes have been carefully chosen to illustrate differences in dosage, acidity and balance. One of the paired sets below, consumed over two evenings, is a good option for one or two drinkers, with apologies for wastage, as half-bottles are currently unavailable except for the Pol Roger Brut Réserve.

1. Ayala Brut Nature NV and Ayala Brut Majeur NV
2. Pol Roger Pure NV and Pol Roger Brut Réserve NV
3. Gosset Celebris Vintage Extra Brut
4. Veuve Clicquot Rich Réserve Vintage

1. SAME BLEND, DIFFERENT DOSAGES

Pour side by side to assess.

Ayala Brut Nature NV

40% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier

Very dry, very fresh and gently citrusy with discreet aromas. There's a spicy introduction to a broad palate, which is quite buttery and has good length. A very aperitif style, aged four years on lees and then topped up after disgorgement with barrel-aged wine. No dosage.

Ayala Brut Majeur NV

40% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier

The same blend as above, but the 7 g/L dosage has bequeathed honey, quince, stone-fruit and sherbet. The fragrances are full and pronounced, the palate luscious and round. Well structured, nicely balanced with fine acidity on a clean, long finish. Aged three years on lees.

Which wine tastes more complete?

Which wine tastes richer?

Which wine has greater length?

2. DIFFERENT BLENDS, DIFFERENT DOSAGES

Pour side by side to assess.

Pol Roger Pure NV

33% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 33% Meunier

This is crafted using fruitier reserve wines of lower acidity than normal, chosen from reserve wines over a three-year period. The goal is to provide balance, flavour and structure to a light and elegant style presenting refreshing minerality and subtlety. This wine displays amazing fullness for zero dosage, because the aromatic and flavour profiles of the carefully selected grapes help round out the style, as does the varied age of the base wines. The palate is juicy, rich and full-bodied rather than luscious. Aromas of redcurrant and baked pineapple abound on a savoury palate.

Pol Roger Brut Réserve NV

33% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 33% Meunier

Drawn from 30 still base wines over at least two vintages, plus about another 50 wines to add complexity. After three years' bottle age, the wine tastes young, vigorous, light, elegant, predictably rounded and delicately buttery, with a smooth and lingering finish. Dosage is 9–10 g/L, and is in perfect balance.

What is your opinion about the equilibrium between sweetness and acidity of these two wines?

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3. A RICH, OLDER WINE WHERE VINIFICATION TECHNIQUES HAVE REDUCED THE NEED FOR DOSAGE

Gosset Celebris Vintage Extra Brut

1998 vintage: 64% Chardonnay, 36% Pinot Noir

3 g/L dosage matched with very fine bead from extended lees ageing makes a scintillating champagne. Chardonnay grapes from Avize, Cramant, Oger and Le Mesnil have been blended with Pinot Noir from Ambonnay, Aÿ, Bouzy and Verzenay. Aromas of bitter almond, hazelnuts and dried fruit herald savoury and vinous flavours. The champagne is long and powerful, ample and rich – very obviously crafted from Grand Cru fruit.

Rate your enjoyment of this wine, where 1 = not much, and 10 = a great deal

4. A HIGHER DOSAGE

Veuve Clicquot Rich Réserve Vintage

Approximately 33% Chardonnay, 60% Pinot Noir, 7% Meunier

The blend includes 17 crus, either Grand or Premier, from vineyards in Verzenay, Ludes, Aÿ and Le-Mesnil-sur-Oger. Dosage is 28 g/L. At first, freshness predominates over balsamic, menthol, liquorice and citrus notes. Then gentle floral acacia follows fruity aromas of red fruits and grapefruit. Dried fruits, almonds, hazelnuts and patisserie mingle with vanilla and sweet spices. In the mouth, the texture is velvety, lively yet firm. The sweetness appears delicately applied and the finish is both smooth and fresh. This champagne can be cellared for another 15 years, assisted by the dosage married to refreshing acidity and its foundation of great fruit.

Describe the finish on this wine

Do you think that it is too sweet?

What about the acidity? Enough?

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Which of these six champagnes is the most successful in terms of balance?

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Which zero dosage champagne do you feel has better balance?

Which champagne tastes the driest?

Which champagne feels roundest in the mouth?

Which champagne is the fruitiest?

Which champagne is the most mineral?