

Worksheet Eleven

DRINK THE LABEL

This tasting covers various types of champagne and different categories of champagne producer. A single consumer should use a single bottle's label to check. On the label you will find exactly where in Champagne the wine originates and you should be able to decipher the rest of the information printed on it. Groups should carefully select champagnes that demonstrate a variety of information, e.g. different sizes, years, styles and producer categories, as well as a variety of locations.

Choose champagnes from the list for this chapter, or create your own list. Using the labels, complete the tables below. This is easy for one or two people, but make sure to discover a label which is new to you.

- » Larmandier-Bernier Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV, now called 'Longitude'
- » Drappier Blanc de Blancs NV Brut
- » Geoffroy Expression Brut Premier Cru NV
Devaux Grande Réserve NV
- » Marc Chauvet Rosé NV
- » Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage
- » Paul Bara *Comtesse Marie de France* Vintage Blanc de Noirs or the Special Club

Brand	NV or Year	Type of Champagne, Style	Producer Category	Location

Additional information from the labels - bottle size, *cru*, disgorgement date, etc:

TASTING NOTES FOR POSSIBLE SELECTIONS

Larmandier-Bernier Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Brut NV

Now called '**Longitude**'.

Larmandier-Bernier is a small biodynamic Champagne grower which handcrafts small batches of wine. Grape yields are very low and minimal intervention policy in the winery involves using indigenous yeasts and long, slow ferments in varying vessels. Dosage is always less than 5 g/L in order to emphasize the wine's flavours. Each wine reflects a particular place, and this Brut Blanc de Blancs is made from Chardonnay grown in the villages of Vertus, Cramant, Avize and Oger – 15 hectares of vines with an average age of well over 30 years. It is typical of a Côte des Blancs mineral style. In its case, reserve wines comprise approximately 40% of the total. The wine undergoes malolactic fermentation, *bâtonnage* is practised, and there is no filtering or fining. The wine spends more than two years on its lees.

Larmandier-Bernier Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru NV is elegant and refined, with sweet floral scents, complex pear, and chalk and smoky characters, along with an underlying minerality that carries right through to its persistent finish.

Drappier Blanc de Blancs NV Brut

Drappier champagnes were great favourites of General de Gaulle. André and Michel Drappier own vineyards in the Aube, the Côte des Blancs and the Mountain of Reims. Their approach tends to the organic. Only the first pressing, the *cuvée*, is used for this wine. Grapes are sourced from Cramant, Bouzy and Urville. Sometimes a small selection of less common white champagne varieties are included, such as Blanc Vrai with its vanilla-like qualities or Pinot Blanc, to increase complexity and roundness.¹

This Blanc de Blancs is characterised by fruitiness and biscuity complexity. With vivacious bead, the bouquet lifts with lime blossoms, citrus, white-fleshed peach and melon. In the mouth it is savoury and refreshing, yet buttery, with marmalades, pickled lemon and baked quince. The texture is smooth and creamy. Its length is warming, persistent, and lingeringly fruit-driven. Rich and elegant, the champagne is quite sumptuous.

Geoffroy Expression Brut NV

Vigneron Indépendant à Cumières

The vineyards of Cumières lie high above the River Marne, facing south-west towards Épernay, and have one of the sunniest and best-exposed aspects over the Marne valley. The Geoffroy family is regarded as the village's most important grower, although it is now headquartered in Aÿ with its gravity-fed presses. The family owns 11 hectares of vines in Cumières and one hectare each in Hautvillers, Damery and Fleury-la Rivière further west along the valley. Many of its wines are fermented in oak, and malolactic fermentation is always avoided.

The Geoffroy Expression Brut NV is an assemblage of two vintages, using a blend of 20% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir and 50% Meunier. It has a fine golden colour with a faint touch of pinkish-grey coral at the rim. Soft fruit aromas, with hints of spices and ginger, introduce very fresh ripe fruit flavours, having distinctive apple and vanilla notes in the mouth and a long finish.

Devaux Grande Réserve NV

30% Chardonnay (from the Aube, near Vitry, and the Côte des Blancs), 70% Pinot Noir (Aube)

This union of co-operatives in the Aube markets itself under a famous Épernay name, Veuve Devaux. The Devaux family sold this brand to the highly respected Union Auboise in 1987.

The Grande Réserve is a blend of 50 *crus*, first pressing only, vinified in stainless steel with malolactic fermentation; 10–20% of the wine is reserves, aged in oak barrels. The wine then rests on its lees for three years. Bright yellow gold, it exhibits a nicely restrained note of autolytic complexity in balance with pure fruitiness and incisive acidity.² Dosage is approximately 9 g/L from *liqueur d'expédition* aged in large oak casks. A delightful floral opening leads to hints of stone-fruit, with yellow plum to finish – smooth, mellow and luscious. You will discover a long and concentrated finish, with some toffee notes and hints of mint and pepper.

Marc Chauvet Rosé

Chauvet is a small (13 hectares on ten sites), family-owned House, established in Rilly-la-Montagne in 1529. Now, nearly 500 years later, Clotilde and Nicolas Chauvet continue the family tradition. The House policy is to produce fine wines, so the NV wine is aged for a minimum of three years. The Rosé, like all Chauvet's wines, does not undergo malolactic fermentation. The Rosé's blend is 80% of the Tradition NV white blend (one-third each Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Meunier) and 20% red wine from the hills around Rilly-La-Montagne. Vinified in stainless steel, the wine is fermented using natural yeasts and includes 30% reserves from previous vintages. Quality champagne, it combines two great attributes: clean fruit and a lovely bready, biscuity aromas and flavours. Look for intense aromas of cherry, berries and redcurrants, and a herbaceous touch.

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage

The largest luxury goods conglomerate in the world, Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH), now owns this famous Grande Marque, founded in 1743.

Please search its website for the latest tasting notes to match your selected vintage, which will certainly involve all three major grape varieties.

Paul Bara Comtesse Marie de France Vintage Blanc de Noirs

The Bara family has been growing grapes for wine since 1833, but it wasn't until it bought a press in 1962 that it stopped sending grapes to the co-operative and began to specialise in champagne production. The estate at Bouzy, plus a half-hectare at Ambonnay making up its 11 hectares, is located in about 30 different parcels. The late Paul Bara's eldest daughter, Chantale, now directs the House. The wines are vinified over several months in temperature-controlled small-volume stainless steel or enamelled tanks, without malolactic fermentation. Usually the vintage wines spend 5–6 years on lees. Paul Bara's Vintage Bouzy Rouge, a still red Pinot Noir, is also excellent.

The Comtesse features rich aromas of mature fruits, with smoky and toasty notes developing to typically Pinot almond-honey nougat – but seductively so, with great elegance. The texture is creamy and caressing, full-bodied with a well-structured freshness balancing the sumptuous layers, the flavour closely matching the aromas. The length is satisfyingly persistent, full of continuously unfolding new aromas (panettone, cumquat skin, and more). Dosage is 9 g/L.

ENDNOTES

1. Curien, Curien, Jean-Marie, *Le Guide Curien de la Champagne 2012-13*, Société de Presse, Promotion, Relations Publiques, Edition et Distribution, Paris, 2008, p. 142.
2. Michael Edwards, *The Finest Wines of Champagnes: A Guide to the Best Houses, Cuvées and Growers*, Fine Wine Editions, Aurum Press Ltd, London, 2009, p. 292.