

Worksheet Fifteen

THE ART OF CHAMPAGNE: BLENDING

Not only do you will experience the blends of large champagne Houses with this tasting, but you will also have an opportunity to discern the complexity of a blend, as opposed to champagne from a single harvest or a single vineyard.

The largest blenders in this tasting, in approximate descending order, are: Moët & Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Nicolas Feuillatte, G. H. Mumm, Laurent-Perrier, Taittinger, Pommery, Piper-Heidsieck, Lanson and Canard-Duchêne.¹

If you wish, mask the champagnes. Present them in pairs, in order to make the differences in blends immediately discernible. If choosing a single bottle for the exercise, either Charles Heidsieck or Bollinger will suit.

- » Moët & Chandon Imperial Brut NV
- » A single-year, single-grape variety, small-grower champagne, such as Chartogne-Taillet Blanc de Blancs Vintage (single year plus single vineyard), Francis Boulard Les Rachais Vintage or Emmanuel Brochet Le Mont Benoît, or a single-vineyard champagne from a négociant, such as Duval-Leroy's Cumières (named after the village) or Authentis, or Cattier's Clos du Moulin.
- » Laurent-Perrier Brut NV
- » Mumm NV
- » Charles Heidsieck Brut Réserve NV
- » Bollinger Special Cuvée NV

FIRST PAIR

1. Moët & Chandon Imperial Brut NV

20–30% Chardonnay, 30–40% Pinot Noir, 30–40% Meunier

From between 200–300 vineyards and villages, 100 different wines are selected for blending, to ensure that the style changes little from year to year.

Appearance

Aromas

.....

Flavours

.....

Texture

Influence of autolysis

Influence of reserve wines

Complexity

Length

Balance, dosage, acidity

Conclusion

Paired with

2. Champagne, single vineyard and/or small grower champagne of your choice – see above

Example: Duval-Leroy Vintage Cumières is a vintage, single-vineyard, oak-fermented, organic, Premier Cru champagne.

Appearance

Aromas

Flavours

Texture

Influence of autolysis

Influence of reserve wines

Complexity

Length

Balance, dosage, acidity

Conclusion

Which of these two champagnes smells and tastes as if there are more ingredients in it? Look for differences in complexity, the characteristics of the vintage, the singularity of the unblended champagne.

SECOND PAIR

1. Laurent Perrier Brut NV

45–50% Chardonnay, 35–40% Pinot Noir, 15% Meunier, using the grapes of 55 villages, with 10–20% reserve wines

Laurent Perrier has 150 hectares of vineyards spread across Champagne, but these only supply 11% of its requirements. The rest comes from long-term contracted growers. Crus and varieties of grapes are pressed and fermented separately. Maturation on lees occurs for three years.

Appearance

Aromas

Flavours

Texture

Influence of autolysis

Influence of reserve wines

Complexity
Length
Balance, dosage, acidity
Conclusion

Paired with

2. G. H. Mumm Cordon Rouge Brut NV

30% Chardonnay, 45% Pinot Noir, 25% Meunier

G. H. Mumm owns 218 hectares of vineyard, which supply 25% of its requirements. It holds 23 million bottles in stock at any one time, including 3.8 million vintage wines.

Appearance

Aromas

Flavours

Texture

Influence of autolysis

Influence of reserve wines

Complexity

Length

Balance, dosage, acidity

Conclusion

Can you taste that the two blends in the second pairing differ?

Can you describe the difference?

THIRD PAIR

Charles Heidsieck Brut Reserve NV

One third each Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Meunier

This House sells about a million bottles per year. The 'new' blend comprises 60 *crus*, 40% of which are reserve wines, some more than ten years old.

Appearance

Aromas

Flavours

Texture

Influence of autolysis
Influence of reserve wines
Complexity
Length
Balance, dosage, acidity
Conclusion

Paired with

2. Bollinger Spéciale Cuvée NV

25% Chardonnay, 60% Pinot Noir, 15% Meunier

Champagne Bollinger sells about 2.1 million bottles per year.

Appearance

Aromas

Flavours

Texture

Influence of autolysis

Influence of reserve wines

Complexity

Length

Balance, dosage, acidity

Conclusion

Can you tell the difference between the two blends in Pair 3?

Which do you think is more complex?

Why do you think so?

Which is richer and in what way?

How do you think that the winemaker achieved this degree of richness?

ENDNOTES

1. *The Drinks Business* magazine, 5 June 2013, pub. Anthony Hawser, London.