

Worksheet Seventeen

TERRIFIED OF TERROIR?

Now it is time to taste the produce of individual pieces of *terroir*, as expressed by the grapes made into champagne. Most Champenois ferment the grapes from each parcel separately. They want to taste the resulting wine *before it is blended*, to confirm their idea of how it will behave in a blend of different years, grape varieties and reserve wines. A narrower demonstration of *terroir* can be gleaned from a single winemaker with a strictly limited range of options chosen from a particular year, a particular village or a particular small plot of vines. Having come thus far in tasting champagne, you already recognize many differences that are attributable to *terroir* – of which the blend of many options is a further objective.

This tasting samples Pinot Noir–dominant champagnes from north to south. Vintage champagnes have been chosen in order to emphasize the influence of *terroir* without the extra dimension added by the reserve wines in non-vintage. There are three pairs of champagnes, each set presenting a grower (his *terroir*), and a merchant (blended *terroirs*). You are asked to score the champagnes. Half points are permitted.

For a single bottle choice, select one of the R.M. champagnes: Chartogne-Taillet, Goutourbe or Serge Mathieu.

- » Mumm Vintage Brut and Chartogne-Taillet Vintage Brut
- » Deutz Vintage Brut and Henri Goutourbe Cuvée Millésime Brut Grand Cru
- » Drappier Vintage Brut and Serge Mathieu Vintage Brut

FIRST PAIR: MONTAGNE DE REIMS

This area of Champagne lies over chalk, with topsoils of varying depths and compositions.

Chartogne-Taillet Vintage Brut

40% Chardonnay, 60% Pinot Noir

Single-vineyard: *Les Couarres*. Stainless steel vinification. Dosage 6 g/L.

The young winemaker, Alexandre Chartogne, says that his clay soil ‘imparts richness and depth, while minerality emphasizes the impression of freshness on the palate’. He notes that, under the clay, the roots of the vines go deep into the chalk.

Mumm Vintage Brut

About 30% Côte des Blancs Chardonnay, 70% Montagne de Reims Pinot Noir

The amount of each grape variety depends on the characteristics of the season. A number of villages contribute to the style and complexity of this champagne, which is usually dosed at 6 g/L.

	Chartogne-Taillet		Mumm	
Appearance	Acceptable or unacceptable	/1		/1
Aromas		/4		/4
Texture, body, palate		/3		/3
Balance		/3		/3
Flavour		/4		/4
Finish		/2		/2
General impression		/3		/3
TOTAL		/20		/20

Key Questions

Is it possible to perceive the second champagne as a possible part of the blend of the first?

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Which attributes of the second champagne do you think might be derived from *terroir*?

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Which champagne do you see as being more complex?

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SECOND PAIR: VALLÉE DE LA MARNE

Chalk underlies the Grand Cru and Premier Cru villages. South-facing Aÿ is on the banks of the River Marne, its vineyards on the southern edges of the Montagne de Reims. Taste the blend containing Chardonnay first.

Champagne Deutz Millésime Brut

30–35% Chardonnay, 60–65% Pinot Noir, 5–10% Meunier

This is made along the street from Goutourbe. The cellar master always assembles the Brut Millésime (Vintage) blend with Aÿ Pinot Noir as a component. Each *cru* is pressed and vinified separately with low temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel, and malolactic fermentation. More than five years on lees adds to the wine's complexity. Dosage 6–11 g/L seasonally dependent.

Henri Goutourbe Cuvée Millésime Brut Grand Cru

about 30% Chardonnay, 70% Pinot Noir

This is made with grapes from various plots in a single village, Grand Cru Aÿ. It is vinified in the same manner as Deutz, with extended lees ageing. Dosage approximately 9 g/L.

	Deutz		Henri Goutourbe	
Appearance	Acceptable or unacceptable	/1		/1
Aromas		/4		/4
Texture, body, palate		/3		/3
Balance		/3		/3
Flavour		/4		/4
Finish		/2		/2
General impression		/3		/3
TOTAL		/20		/20

Key Questions

Is it possible to perceive the second champagne as a possible part of the blend of the first?

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Which champagne do you see as being more complex?

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THIRD PAIR: CÔTE DES BAR

The area has steeply rolling hills, and thus various vineyard situations. The grapes are among the earliest to ripen in Champagne due to the southern location. The topsoils consist of broken limestone interspersed with clays and fossilised shells. The wines from this part of Champagne are usually richly fruity and full-bodied, often reminiscent of northern Burgundy in their minerality.

Once again, taste the blend containing Chardonnay first.

Drappier Vintage

35% Chardonnay, 55% Pinot Noir, 10% Meunier

The Pinot Noir is mainly sourced from Urville, Drappier's village on the Côte des Bar. 50% of the wine is stored in oak barrels for a year to add some gentle reductive and oxidative charm to the blend, which is given a dosage of 5–7g/L, depending on the year. Natural settling, no filtering and minimal sulphur contribute to the flavour profile. Helpfully, the disgorgement date is written on the label.

Serge Mathieu Millésime

100% Pinot Noir

An hour south-west by car from Drappier, at Avirey-Lingey, are the vines of Champagne Serge Mathieu. His vintage is assembled from 18 different parcels of vines. The winemaking features temperature-controlled fermentation, little sulphur, light filtering and ageing in stainless steel before blending and bottling. More than 5 years on lees adds to the supple texture. Dosage 6–9g/L.

	Drappier		Serge Mathieu	
Appearance	Acceptable or unacceptable	/1		/1
Aromas		/4		/4
Texture, body, palate		/3		/3
Balance		/3		/3
Flavour		/4		/4
Finish		/2		/2
General impression		/3		/3
TOTAL		/20		/20

Key Questions

Is it possible to perceive the second champagne as a possible part of the blend of the first?

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Which attributes of the second champagne do you think might be derived from *terroir*?

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Which champagne do you see as being more complex?

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