

Worksheet Nineteen

THE VALLEY OF THE MARNE

Many vigneronns extract wonderful results by careful management and showing respect for their local conditions, micro-climate, topsoil and subsoil. For this tasting select the required number of bottles from the following:

- » **Champagne Pannier Brut Sélection NV**
- » **Champagne Tarlant Cuvée Louis NV**
- » **Champagne A.R. Lenoble Brut Intense NV**
- » **Champagne Geoffroy Expression Brut NV**
- » **Champagne Gaston Chiquet Cuvée Tradition NV**
- » **Champagne Gatinois Tradition Brut NV**

Champagne Pannier Brut Sélection NV

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

Representing the Western Marne Valley, the Aisne and the Seine-et-Marne.

This large, highly regarded cooperative draws from many local vigneronns. Champagne Pannier is named after a winemaker who set up business in Dizy in 1899. His son, Gaston, discovered the twelfth-century cellars at Chateau-Thierry and secured them for his use. A fourteenth-century carving of an archer, discovered on a cellar's rock face, provided the inspiration for its logo. Brut Sélection is aged on lees for three years. In the words of the cellar master, Philippe Dupuis, 'The fact that the grapes come from 600 hectares spread over very variable sites helps to balance the blends in a soft non-aggressive style. Our Brut Sélection is not an elitist wine. It is meant to be easy to drink.'¹ I find it bready, balanced, aperitif in style, with good length. Dosage 11.2 g/L.

Appearance

Aromas

Palate (flavour, texture, balance, structure)

Length

Distinguishing feature or your comment

Serve when?

With what?

Champagne Tarlant Cuvée Louis NV

50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir

This champagne is from the Marne Valley Left Bank (Rive Gauche).

The Tarlant family has been growing vines since the late 1600s in the far west of the Marne Valley, the Aisne, near the village of Gland. About a century later the family moved to Oeuilly, on the left bank of the Marne, where it is today. Cuvée Louis is a single-vineyard expression of the grapes from a named old vineyard, Les Crayons, in a good location. The champagne's base is blended from a declared

vintage, with added reserve wines from two prior declared vintage years. Vinification occurs in wood with regular *bâtonnage* for eight months. Fruitiness is retained by blocking malolactic fermentation, and dosage is Ultra Brut (3 g/L). Lees ageing is protracted, an average of 5 years – and commendably, the disgorgement date is stated on the bottle’s back label. The resulting wine is a golden yellow champagne, with powerful aromas of dried fruits, vanilla and grilled nuts. The palate is full, round and complex, honeyed and opulent. It rewards cellaring.

Appearance

Aromas

Palate (flavour, texture, balance, structure)

Length

Distinguishing feature or your comment

Serve when?

With what?

Champagne A.R. Lenoble Brut Intense NV

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

This champagne is from the Marne Valley Right Bank (Rive Droite).

In 1915, during the First World War, Armand-Raphael (A.R.) Graser fled Alsace (which is on the border with Germany) with his family and sought safety in Champagne. He acquired vineyards at Damery and planted them with ‘noble’ grape varieties. So came about the name A.R. Lenoble. The current winemaker, Anne Malassange, is the fourth generation of the family. The wine is a classic and harmonious blend of the three main grapes of Champagne. The cuvée contains 10% reserve wines from prior years. Of deep gold colour, the nose opens sweetly with rounded aromas of apples, pears, plums, redcurrants and honeysuckle with a hint of chalky minerality. Sweet brioche aromas betray time on lees. Tightly structured around its nose, the palate is creamy, well balanced, ample, with pleasing length. The freshness and the blend of fruits – fresh, stewed and dried – are the hallmarks of this champagne, which repays some time on cork. Dosage 5.5 g/L.

Appearance

Aromas

Palate (flavour, texture, balance, structure)

Length

Distinguishing feature or your comment

Serve when?

With what?

Champagne Geoffroy Expression NV

20% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 50% Meunier (percentages depend on the harvest)

This champagne is made from grapes from the Marne Valley Right Bank (Rive Droite) and the beginning of the Grande Vallée de la Marne, from between Fleury-la-Rivière and Hautvillers.

Although now based in Aÿ, the Geoffroy family can be traced to Cumières as far back as the seventeenth century. The family's vineyards are principally located there, but it also owns holdings at neighbouring Hautvillers, Damery and Fleury-la-Rivière. The vines are planted 19% to Chardonnay, 42% to Pinot Noir and 39% to Meunier, but the family also has a very small quantity of Arbanne and Petit Meslier. Grass is grown between the rows and yields are deliberately reduced to enhance concentration. After grapes have been harvested by a number of 'tries', or passes through the vineyards, to ensure 100% ripeness, Jean-Baptiste vinifies all 35 parcels separately, some in oak, and malolactic fermentation is blocked. Reserve wines comprise approximately 30%; the champagne spends a minimum of 2 years on lees. The champagne has a delicate nose of ripe apple and summer fruits, including red cherries. Light, fresh, fruity, crisp and clean in the mouth, the finale finishes with a chalky minerality. It is an aperitif style which repays cellaring. Dosage is 5–9 g/L, depending on the year's fruit/acid balance.

Appearance

Aromas

Palate (flavour, texture, balance, structure)

Length

Distinguishing feature or your comment

Serve when?

With what?

Champagne Gaston Chiquet Cuvée Tradition Premier Cru NV

35% Chardonnay, 25% Pinot Noir, 40% Meunier

This champagne comes from La Grande Vallée de la Marne.

The Chiquets planted their first vines in 1746, but always sold their grapes to major Houses until taking the step to be among the first to market their own champagnes under their name in 1919. In 1935 two of the brothers went separate ways, so that today some Chiquet cousins own Champagne Jacquesson. Since 2003 Nicolas and Antoine have managed the estate of 23 hectares, which is situated in communes at Dizy, Hautvillers, Aÿ and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ, which make the champagnes of this House very representative of the area. The readily available and very easy-drinking Tradition Brut is blended from a combination of two harvests, plus reserves. It always undergoes malolactic fermentation and rests on its lees for 2½–4 years. Golden, rounded, pure, fresh and tasty when young, cellaring maximises its complexity. Dosage is 8 g/L.

Appearance

Aromas

Palate (flavour, texture, balance, structure)

Length

Distinguishing feature or your comment

Serve when?

With what?

Champagne Gatinois Brut Réserve NV

20% Chardonnay, 80% Pinot Noir

Gatinois is based in Grand Cru Aÿ, the greatest historic village in the Grande Vallée de la Marne, where the family has been located since 1696. Twelve generations have succeeded one another, caretaking the vineyards for future generations. Six of its seven hectares are devoted to Pinot Noir, the remainder is Chardonnay. The family’s holdings are truly representative of Aÿ, being dispersed in 30 different places in the commune, with many old vines adding to the depth and concentration of the wines (Gatinois also sells grapes to nearby Bollinger). Reserve wines, amounting to 20–30% of this champagne, are stored in enamelled tanks after undergoing malolactic fermentation, which is blocked for all their other wines. The champagnes are generous, but the Brut Réserve NV, which spends three years on lees, is particularly beautiful for its price – round, fruity and balanced, while demonstrating the power of the Aÿ *terroir*’s vinosity and length. In the words of champagne luminary Michael Edwards, ‘if ever there was an entry-level champagne that really tasted of its origins, this is it.’² Perfect – with or without fish or poultry, which would suit it very well. The wine is worth cellaring. The dosage is 7 g/L.

Appearance

Aromas

Palate (flavour, texture, balance, structure)

Length

Distinguishing feature or your comment

Serve when?

With what?

Which viticultural area of the Marne is your preference for drinking?

If you were to do this tasting again, in what order would you place the champagnes?

ENDNOTES

1. Curien, Jean-Marie, *Le Guide Curien de la Champagne 2012–2013*, Société de Presse, Promotion, Relations Publiques, Edition et Distribution, Paris, 2011, p. 203.
2. Edwards, Michael, *The Finest Wines of Champagne: A Guide to the Best Houses, Cuvées and Growers*, Aurum Press Ltd, London, 2009, p.158.