

## Worksheet Twenty One

# THE CÔTE DES BLANCS AND RELATED AREAS

So many Côte des Blancs grower and Grand Marque champagnes provide many options, as the region and the Chardonnay grape have become very fashionable. It is not necessary to approach the heights or expense of Krug's Clos du Mesnil to find excellent champagnes from the area – and ones that are good value for money – in the list below.

For just one person, select your champagne from any of the suggestions. Otherwise, organise the tasting as follows:

- » Ulysse Collin Les Pierrières Extra Brut NV
- » Claude Cazals' Cuvée Vive Extra Brut NV
- » Agrapart & Fils Les Terroirs Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs NV
- » Lancelot-Pienne Cuvée de la Table Ronde Brut NV
- » Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Blanc de Blancs NV
- » Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Vintage Brut

The wines are ranged in approximate order of balance between sweetness and acidity. Score the champagnes *and* comment on characters of *terroir* found in the champagnes. Here is some general information about the champagnes and their *terroirs*.

### Ulysse Collin *Les Pierrières* Extra Brut

A disciple of Anselme Selosse, about whose influence a whole chapter could be written, Olivier Collin was inspired to make his own champagne after work experience with his mentor and in 2003 he created the marque Ulysse Collin. The family had owned and worked vineyards in Congy as far back as 1812. Collin is a small producer, his vineyards being around nine hectares, based in Congy and Vert-Toulon in the valley of the Petit Morin River and in the Sézannais. Intense work in the vineyards, minimal chemical use, a biological approach and no use of herbicides provide him with healthy and flavour-filled fruit that he chooses to vinify from their individual *terroirs*, after picking at maximum ripeness. Barrel fermentation (small barrels) extended to 13 months, natural yeasts, no clarification or filtration, over 30 months' lees time and extra-brut dosage (1–2 g/L) allow the fullest expression of his individual vineyards in champagnes of outstanding individuality. Chardonnay for *Les Pierrières* is from a single year, from a parcel of 1.2 hectares of Vert-Toulon's chalky flinty *terroir* near the marshes. Disgorgement dates are shown on the label. Allow your selection time to breathe; think of character-full still wines – with effervescence – and consider serving it with an appropriate food match – perhaps shellfish.

Collin also produces *Les Roises*, 100% Chardonnay, which is based on a year, but with reserves added, and *Les Maillons*, 100% Pinot Noir from vines planted in 1971 in the Sézannais, normally known for its Chardonnay.

### Claude Cazals' *Cuvée Vive* Extra Brut

For lean, linear and focused minerality, complete purity in a fresh aperitif style and authenticity to *terroir*, look for producer Claude Cazals' *Cuvée Vive* Extra Brut. The Cazals have been established in Le Mesnil since 1897. They lay claim to the lasting gratitude of the Champenois for having helped invent the gyropalette, thereby creating a huge labour- and time-saving device. In order to make this champagne, Delphine Cazals, the granddaughter of the founders, has blended wines from Le Mesnil (including some from the younger vines of their walled vineyard, Clos Cazals) and Oger, using minimal reserve

wines, and allowing them to rest on their lees for 7 years. The result is exciting champagne of balanced elegance and a persistent aromatic and salty mineral finish. Dosage is 3 g/L.

### **Agrapart & Fils *Terroirs* Extra Brut Blanc De Blancs NV**

Champagne Agrapart & Fils was founded in Avize at the end of the nineteenth century. Today its vineyards extend to 10 hectares, principally on the Côte des Blancs in Oger, Cramant, Oiry and Avize, with some further afield at Bergères-les-Vertus and in the Marne Valley at Mardeuil and Avenay Val d'Or. About 60 different vineyards afford the company many different micro-*terroirs*. Careful viticulture leaning towards the organic and homeopathic, together with many old vines, enables the producer to make champagnes of great style and flavour, while maintaining elegance above all. You will notice the pronounced minerality of *Terroirs* Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs NV, an equal blend of two years' harvest from four villages on the Côte des Blancs proper. Indigenous yeasts, malolactic fermentation and manual *remuage* are part of the Agrapart style. The champagne has rested on its lees a minimum of three years, resulting in the addition of appealing aromas of brioche. Dosage 5 g/L.

### **Lancelot-Pienne Cuvée De La Table Ronde Brut NV**

Lancelot-Pienne Cuvée de la Table Ronde Brut NV, the 'blend of the Round Table', is a fresh and creamy 100% Chardonnay blend of years from choice vineyards in Cramant, Avize and Chouilly, with 20% solera reserve wines fleshing out the texture and adding a touch of vinosity. The wines have undergone malolactic fermentation. The Lancelot family has owned the vines since the early 1900s and began to commercialise its own champagne after the Second World War. In 1967, the vineyards at Chouilly came into the family by marriage. Managed since 2005 by young oenologist Gilles Lancelot, whose grandfather was G.H. Mumm's chief vigneron in Cramant, the champagnes are beginning to receive international notice. Dosage is 7 g/L.

### **Besserat De Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Blanc de Blancs NV**

After tasting any of the above, it's really interesting to see what the bigger Houses do from the same areas of the Côte des Blancs as smaller producers. Besserat de Bellefon, based in Épernay, is a House whose rising fortunes will be explored later, and whose Cuvée des Moines Blanc de Blancs NV is well respected by some great Michelin-starred chefs. The linearity and incisive precision and minerality – of Cramant, Avize, Oger and Le Mesnil – is softened by a lower pressure treatment, in the same way as Mumm's Cramant. The effect is textural: it is softly chalky, smooth, but with an underlying cutting edge. Perfect balance! Less than 10% reserve wines, cold settling, minimal handling, along with non-malo treatment maintains the freshness and subtle fruit. Ageing on lees is for a minimum of four years, during which autolysis develops a light breadiness, and dosage is a food-friendly 9 g/L.

### **Billecart-Salmon Blanc de Blancs Vintage Brut**

Billecart-Salmon is a much larger House than any of the others in this selection. Pioneers of cold settling, masterful wine makers with great depth of experience, its champagnes are well loved by many. Its Blanc de Blancs Vintage Brut is distinguished by its vintage, being assembled from special parcels in Chouilly, Avize and Le Mesnil. Partly vinified in old barrels but mostly in stainless steel, the House displays its mastery of finesse. Dosage is 10 g/L.

## **TERROIR EXPRESSIONS IN GENERAL**

Check the *terroir* expressions below against what you find in the glass.

- » **Avize:** Fleshy when further north; generally mineral, linear and focused, with lead pencil characters. Dominant apple and citrus aromas, sometimes musky; light, elegant, acidic, pale in colour, age-worthy.
- » **Chouilly:** Of mixed quality, with some slopes, some flatter land. Crisp, dry, focused and pure from the best sites. There can be fresh almond notes, roasted notes especially of walnuts. It is both rounder in the mouth, more forward and more full-bodied than Avize, Cramant, Oger or Le Mesnil.

- » **Cramant:** Powerful bouquet, dynamic, racy, big, floral, scented. Mineral and grippy, depth, finesse, plus light caramel flavour, age-worthy, more power further north and east-south-east. Creamy, fat, even milky toffee notes are year-dependent. Ageing gives nutty, roasted, chocolate, leather, truffle qualities.
- » **Oger:** Gentle fragrance, very soft chalky minerality, and rounded, delicate, good ripeness, can develop honeyed richness.
- » **Oiry:** Like the lower slopes of Chouilly. Fruity, especially grapefruit when young, more generosity and less minerality.
- » **Le Mesnil:** Intense, piercing, pure, stony, mineral, salty, floral, understated and acidulous when young; subsequently many complex flavours, full of nuances and complexity, penetrating bouquet, with a lacy cushiony sumptuous texture.
- » **Vert-Toulon:** Stony, mineral, fresh almost minty, chalky, fruity, round.

As before, half-points are acceptable.

Champagne		Score	
<b>Ulysse Collin</b>	Appearance:	/1	
	Aromas:	/4	
	Body and texture:	/3	
	Balance:	/3	
	Flavour:	/4	
	Finish (length):	/2	
	General impression:	/3	
		/20	
	<i>Terroir match: Vert-Toulon</i>		
	<b>Claude Cazals</b>	Appearance:	/1
Aromas:		/4	
Body and texture:		/3	
Balance:		/3	
Flavour:		/4	
Finish (length):		/2	
General impression:		/3	
		/20	
<i>Terroir matches: Le Mesnil, Oger</i>			

<b>Agrapart</b>	Appearance:	/1
	Aromas:	/4
	Body and texture:	/3
	Balance:	/3
	Flavour:	/4
	Finish (length):	/2
	General impression:	/3
		/20
	Terroir matches: Avize, Oger, Cramant, Oiry	
<b>Lancelot-Pienne</b>	Appearance:	/1
	Aromas:	/4
	Body and texture:	/3
	Balance:	/3
	Flavour:	/4
	Finish (length):	/2
	General impression:	/3
		/20
	Terroir matches: Cramant, Avize, Chouilly	
<b>Besserat de Bellefon</b>	Appearance:	/1
	Aromas:	/4
	Body and texture:	/3
	Balance:	/3
	Flavour:	/4
	Finish (length):	/2
	General impression:	/3
		/20
	Terroir matches: Cramant, Avize, Oger, Le Mesnil	

<b>Billecart-Salmon</b>	Appearance:	/1
	Aromas:	/4
	Body and texture:	/3
	Balance:	/3
	Flavour:	/4
	Finish (length):	/2
	General impression:	/3
		/20
	Terroir matches: Chouilly, Avize, Le Mesnil	

**Two questions**

There are so many microclimates and variations in a village’s vineyards that champagnes don’t always seem to come from where they in fact originated. In your opinion, which champagne is closest to matching the ‘typical’ champagne of its *terroir*?

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Your favourite? .....

and do you think that your preference is based on *terroir* or winemaking? .....

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