

## Worksheet Thirty Three

# THE EFFECT OF WOOD

So many choices spring to mind for this tasting. Skilled winemakers do not trumpet wood nuances in their cuvées, but integrate them fully so that consumers experience more complexity in the champagne and good textural effect. Below is a list of six wines that have had some time in barrel, but if you cannot find them further suggestions appear at the end of this Worksheet. A sole imbibitor should, of course, choose only one of the wood-influenced champagnes. Allow some breathing time for all of these wines after opening.

The suggested no-wood reference champagne for comparison is a pristine non-vintage Barons de Rothschild, but you could also drink Pol Roger Brut Réserve, Delamotte Brut, Deutz Classic, Henriot Brut Souverain, or Piper-Heidsieck Brut.

### Reference champagne: Barons de Rothschild

*60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir and Meunier in varying percentages*

Assembled from principally Grand Cru grapes. Fermented in stainless steel tanks. Up to 40 per cent reserve wines that have been stored in stainless steel are added during blending. Four years on lees. Dosage 6–7 g/L.

### 1. Jacques Selosse 'Initiale' Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs NV

*100% Chardonnay*

'In winemaking, we can only lose, reveal or destroy what nature provides,' says Selosse. 'Initiale' is a blend of three years' harvests from the Côte des Blancs, fully fermented in oak, the barrels of differing provenance and size, with 15 per cent of the volume in new oak. MLF is dependent on the barrel. There is a schedule of *bâtonnage*, 8–10 months resting on lees, and natural yeasts for both fermentations.

### 2. Veuve Fourny Cuvée 'R' NV

*Approximately 90% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Noir*

A blend of two consecutive harvests from organic/biodynamically managed old vines in low-yielding Vertus vineyards. 100 per cent fermented in burgundy barrels, minimum three years old, then aged on lees for nine months to two years (season dependent) in old oak. Weekly *bâtonnage* for up to 6–8 months is carefully monitored to ensure the correct textural result. Not filtered.

### 3. Jacques Picard 'Art de Vigne' Vintage

*60% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier*

A Chardonnay and Pinot blend from named vineyards of older vines in Berru, Montbré and Avenay Val d'Or. Undergoes 100 per cent barrel fermentation in cognac-style barrels over ten years of age, plus two burgundy barrels. José Lievens chooses his old barrels by how the vendor's wine tastes from the barrels prior to his purchase. Handling regime is as described in the chapter. Weekly *bâtonnage* over a period of up to three months, depending on requirements.

### 4. Drappier 'Grande Sendrée' Vintage

*45% Chardonnay (from Urville), 55% Pinot Noir (from Urville)*

Named after a vineyard that was reduced to cinders in the great fire of 1838 – except that 's' was transposed for 'c' when the mapping was done. About one third of the wine has been aged for nine months in large oak *foudres* (5000 L) averaging more than seven years of age. This is a Prestige Cuvée.

## 5. Marguet Père & Fils Rosé NV

70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir

An excellent House with vines in Grand Cru Ambonnay and Bouzy. Biodynamic farming, older vines (average planting in 1976). Fermentation and ageing takes place over nine months in bordeaux barrels. *Bâtonnage* is carried out depending on the season, and there is always full malolactic fermentation. Bottling occurs at a biodynamically propitious time. Dosage liqueur is stored in jeroboams and always dispensed at 3–6 g/L. There is a low sulphur regime.

## 6. Henri Giraud Fût de Chêne Vintage

30% Chardonnay, 70% Pinot Noir

100% Aÿ Grand Cru grapes, fermented in burgundy-sized Argonne oak barrels, 20–30 per cent of which are new. Twelve months' storage on fine lees after primary fermentation, without *bâtonnage*, followed by extended storage time on lees during secondary fermentation.

If barrels were used for fermentation by all Champagne winemakers in 2013, more than 1.2 million would have been required for the first fermentation, plus more for longer-term reserve wines and dosage liqueurs.

List your champagnes, and then check the boxes.

- 1 .....
- 2 .....
- 3 .....
- 4 .....
- 5 .....
- 6 .....

Wood Check	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Appearance</b>						
Pale gold or darker colour						
<b>Aromas</b>						
Fruity, floral						
Smoke						
Spices						
Ginger/gingerbread						
Vanilla						
Coconut						
Savoury						
Dill						
Caramel						
Toffee						
Coffee						
Pepper						
Licorice						
Cigar box						
Sherry						

Wood Check	1	2	3	4	5	6
Toast						
Mineral						
Complex						
Rich						
<b>Flavour</b>						
Rich						
Concentrated						
<b>Texture</b>						
Smooth						
Silky, supple						
Creamy						
Buttery						
<b>Finish</b>						
Long						
Balanced						
Harmonious						
<b>Order of preference</b>						

Which wines show over-development? .....

Stale? .....

Astringent? .....

Tannic? .....

Too much wood? .....

Not like champagne at all? .....

## FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR WOOD-INFLUENCED CHAMPAGNES

If you love the wood influence, or cannot find the champagnes listed above for this worksheet, here are some more to enjoy. Those already mentioned in the main text of the chapter are not listed again. Consult the producers' websites for more information.

- » **A.R. Lenoble** Ferments the best of the harvest by the parcel, in wood, and stores some reserve wines in wood. Two champagnes from the 'Terroirs' collection are partly fermented in barrel, as are proportions of the prestige cuvées.
- » **Agrapart** Ferments the best cuvées partly or fully in wood, and ages reserves in five-year-old, used *demi-muids* from Burgundy and the Loire.
- » **André Jacquart** Uses no MLF: long ageing and barrel work supply the roundness. Barrels are small oak which have been previously used for 2–4 vintages of white burgundy. Each wood gives a different taste. 'Mesnil Expérience' is up to 70 per cent barrel fermented.
- » **Bèrèche** Some first fermentation and storage of reserve wines in *demi-muid*, being a mixture of new and old oak. The cuvée 'Le Cran' is fermented using 30 per cent new oak.
- » **Besserat de Bellefon** Its *cuvée de prestige*, 'B de B', was released in 2014 to celebrate the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the House and, more importantly, its re-awakening. Fifty per cent of it is fermented and aged over 4–8 months in very old traditional barrels (205 L).
- » **Boizel** The cuvée 'Sous Bois' Vintage is vinified in old champagne and burgundy barrels, then aged for nine months in barrel before blending.

- » **Bruno Paillard** 'Uses wood as a seasoning, and to give some colour and the ability to age'. The prestige 'Nec Plus Ultra' is a vintage champagne which has been barrique-fermented then aged in barrel for ten months prior to blending. For other cuvées, some reserve wines are stored in barrel and selected crus are fermented in small oak.
- » **Camille Saves** Reserves are stored in old barriques. The vintage prestige 'Anaïs Jolicœur', is fermented in 205 L oak barrels, as is the Bouzy rouge.
- » **Charles Ellner** Vintages are partly oak fermented. The 'Seduction' range is partly or fully oak fermented, depending on the year.
- » **Collard-Picard** Olivier Collard uses barrels for 'Cuvée des Archives' and his prestige cuvée.
- » **David Léclapart** Uses old burgundy barrels for fermenting and ageing his top cuvée, 'L'Apôtre'. 'L'Artiste' is fermented half in barrels and half in enamelled tank. 'L'Apôtre' is particularly delicious, enticing with subtly teasing perfumes; allowing this wine to breathe rewards with attractive roundness, good balancing acidity, superb length and enjoyable vinosity.
- » **De Sousa** Prestige and old-vine juices undergo first fermentation in burgundy barrels, 15 per cent of which are new. 'Cuvée des Caudalies' Grand Cru Vintage remains in wood for up to ten months and there is some *bâtonnage*. The Pinot Noir for the rosé remains a year in barrel. The exception to de Sousa's oak régime for prestige wines is cuvée '3A', where only the 50 per cent Avize Chardonnay component sees wood.
- » **Diebolt-Vallois** The top 'Fleur de Passion' is fully fermented in oak while the prestige Vintage is also aged in oak casks. Reserves wines are stored in large oak barrels (4000 L).
- » **Dosnon & Lepage** Fermented and aged in five-year-old oak barrels.
- » **Emmanuel Brochet** First fermentation has been in burgundy barrels since 1997. Two new (sometimes 2–3 years old) barrels are purchased each year.
- » **Eric Rodez** Rodez loves oak. There is 20–100 per cent barrel fermentation, depending on the cuvée.
- » **Fleury** Ferments and ages a small percentage of reserve and prestige wines in old barrels. Reserve wines are stored in *foudres*.
- » **Francis Boulard** Uses old wood of various sizes, from champagne casks to huge vats. Cuvée 'Petraea' is the delicious and complex product of a barrel solera, truly prestigious.
- » **François Diligent** 'Trois Pinots' sees wood, as does the very delicious rosé made from six champagne grape varieties.
- » **Georges Laval** Stores reserves in barrel on fine lees. Before fermentation fresh juice is added, using the fruit of young vines only, because the high acidity freshens the mixture.
- » **Henri Giraud** The king of Argonne oak. He buys some new barrels each year.
- » **J. Dumangin** 'Trio des Ancêtres' is aged one year in wood, then ten years in bottle on lees.
- » **J. Lorient-Pagel** Stores some reserve wines in wood.
- » **J.L. Vergnon** Ferments all wines intended for reserves in oak. Fifty per cent new wood is used for his cuvée 'Confidence', which is vinified entirely in oak.<sup>1</sup> The wines are lovely, but need time.
- » **Janisson Baradon** Ferments all wines by the parcel in small oak, and stores reserve wines in oak.
- » **Jacques Lassaigue** Single-vineyard 'Le Cotet' undergoes first fermentation in barrels.
- » **Jean Milan** Brut Réserve and Brut Grande Réserve '1864' undergo first fermentation, then ageing in barrel prior to blending.
- » **Laherte Frères** ('Wood is a noble material', says Aurélien.) Rosé is 100 per cent barrel fermented in *foudres* and vats, and many other cuvées are given a major portion of barrel treatment. New barrels are used for approximately 40 per cent of the vintage champagne. These fine wines require cellar time.
- » **Larmandier-Bernier** Ferments in stainless steel and wood, but the more expensive champagne enjoys all wood. Increasing use of oak, carefully handled.
- » **Marc Hébrart** 'Rive Gauche Rive Droite' Extra Brut receives first fermentation and ageing in oak.

- » **Nicolas Maillart** Maillart is a gifted winemaker, ageing his reserves wines in barrel and partly fermenting his rosé and vintage champagne in barrels. The single-vineyard prestige champagnes, 'Les Chaillots Gillis' and 'Les Francs de Pied' are both fully fermented in barrel. These are wonderful champagnes.
- » **Paul Déthune** Vinifies reserve wines in oak, which contribute up to 50 per cent of non-vintage blends. Special cuvées, including the vintage 'Cuvée à L'Ancienne', are fully oak-fermented in Champenois casks, with two new barrels introduced each year. He also has a very large barrel solera for his prestige cuvée, 'Princesse des Thunes'.
- » **Pehu-Simonet** 'Antonin', named after winemaker David Pehu's son, uses burgundy barrels from Verzy oak, which have seen 2–3 years of prior use, for fermentation. Like a number of oak lovers, David received his wine education in Burgundy. Barrels are used for fermenting the vintage, the Blanc de Noirs and 15 per cent of the Extra Brut.
- » **Ployez-Jacquemart** The prestige cuvée 'Liesse d'Harbonville' is 100 per cent fermented and then aged for six months in bordeaux barriques.
- » **Tarlant** Ferments all *terroir* and prestige champagne in wood, as well as some wines intending for vintage selection. NV is stored in wood after fermentation but before blending, and reserves also stored in wood. Everything from this domain is good.
- » **Veuve Fourny** Features another Burgundian-educated son of the House. Traditional Champenois-size barrels are in the majority, bought new, and used for reserve wines. A champagne from the top of its range features in the tasting notes above. About a quarter of its production sees fermentation in wood.
- » **Vincent Couche** Uses barrels for fermentation of a proportion of most cuvées, with 72 per cent of the vintage rosé undergoing the process.
- » **Voirin-Jumel** 'Cuvée 555' is fermented in old burgundy barrels.

## ENDNOTES

1. Tyson Stelzer, *The Champagne Guide 2014–15*, Hardie Grant, Richmond, Victoria, Australia, 2013, p. 676 e-book, p.196 hard copy.