

Worksheet Forty One

THE NEW ENTREPRENEURS

A wealth of choice awaits the avid champagne taster who wants to explore the champagne marques discussed in the preceding chapter. There is the extensive range of Champagne Taittinger, some of which have been used as examples in this book already, and new developments from Philipponnat. You can sample champagne from any of the names in this chapter, just to celebrate the constant renewal and improvement being driven by committed individuals in the industry. However, the recommended wines below compare Bruno Paillard's 'compositions' (his word) with the totally different styles of Champagne Thiénot.

Alas, the American playwright Elmer Rice summed up the situation for the solo imbibor, that 'you can have too much champagne to drink, but you can never have enough'; one bottle will have to be chosen from the many listed below. For a group, a grand comparison is possible. A most interesting comparative tasting would be to select one of each House's Brut Non-Vintage, and/or one of each Blanc de Blancs Vintage, and/or one of each Rosé Non-Vintage. A luxury option would be to match the 'Nec Plus Ultra' with the 'Cuvée Alain Thiénot'.

CHAMPAGNE BRUNO PAILLARD

A range of premium champagnes of interest and complexity, especially for those who appreciate that champagne with age is always the best. The wines have a brilliant appearance, usually green-tinged, are lively and elegant in the mouth, with freshness carrying well into their age. Paillard knows how to make good low-dosage champagne of purity and penetrating length. Attention to detail and generally uncompromising quality are hallmarks of this fine-wine-with-finest-effervescence brand.

Made from first pressings only, all Paillard champagnes rest on their lees far longer than stipulated by regulations. In this respect, no expense has been spared. The solera-style reserves were begun in 1985, being aged in a mix of tank and barrel, and add to the complex nuances of the non-vintage compositions. Sufficient post-disgorgement resting time, an important point overlooked by many, is also a strong point. Champagne Bruno Paillard was the first champagne House to respect its clients' intelligence sufficiently to put the disgorgement date on the labels. In the same manner, there is complete transparency about all steps of the winemaking process, from sourcing the grapes, to harvest, to the final product.

As a special touch, each year Paillard's vintage champagnes carry a commissioned work of art on their labels. Depending on how the wine speaks to Bruno, different artists are chosen, being given a couple of words as the key for their creation – for example, 'harmony, symphony' for the 2004 blend and 'childhood dreams' for the same year's blanc de blancs.

Bruno Paillard Blanc de Blancs Réserve Privée

100% Chardonnay

Grand Cru Côte des Blancs fruit, 20–35% reserve wines from solera, four years on its lees plus eight months' post-disgorgement ageing, the champagne's lower pressure bottling admirably suits the haute couture, complex style. Dosage is 5–6 g/L.

Bruno Paillard Brut Première Cuvée

33% Chardonnay, 45% Pinot Noir, 22% Meunier

A composition of 32 crus, 20–58% reserves from the perpetual reserve, more than three years *sur lie*, plus 3–4 months' post-disgorgement time. Dosage is 6–7 g/L.

Bruno Paillard Brut Rosé Première Cuvée

Significant Chardonnay but Pinot Noir dominant, percentages not disclosed

Chardonnay grapes are from the northern Côte des Blancs. Both the addition method and the *saignée* method are used. The champagne spends more than three years on lees. Dosage is 6–7 g/L.

Bruno Paillard 'Art Label' Brut Vintage Blend

29–48% Chardonnay, 42–52% Pinot Noir, 0–29% Meunier

Composition varies widely, depending on the year. Lees' time 9–15 years, plus at least one year post-disgorgement. Dosage is 5–6 g/L.

Bruno Paillard 'Art Label' Brut Vintage Blanc de Blancs

100% Chardonnay

Eight years or more on lees, plus a minimum 8–10 months post-disgorgement, dosage is 5 g/L.

Bruno Paillard 'Nec Plus Ultra' Vintage

Approximately 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir

The name comes from the Latin, translating as 'nothing beyond', but the phrase has come to mean 'no quality beyond' or 'state-of-the-art'. A Grand Cru composition of about 50% of the wines from sources such as Cramant, Chouilly and Le Mesnil, and about 50% Verzenay and Bouzy, with a feature of nine months' barrel maturation. Always well aged, always spectacular, totally luxurious, and one to relish before the grim reaper arrives. Dosage is about 4 g/L.

In addition, I have caught sight of a handsomely boxed, magnificent Bruno Paillard Old Disgorgements collection, which could have been assembled with Chapter 31 in mind.

CHAMPAGNE THIÉNOT

The style is fresh, light, fruity, balanced and clean, with a bright marked elegance and harmony – champagne in modern but traditional form, its marketing firmly aimed at the luxury and glamour market. When you find the marque in your bottle shop, you will have no idea how long it has been sitting there, as it is not currently the policy of the House to provide disgorgement dates. The test will be in the pleasure of drinking – and remember, if champagne is stored well, ageing on cork adds a great deal of interest.

Traditional Range

Thiénot Brut

35–45% Chardonnay, 35–40% Pinot Noir, 20–35% Meunier, 20% reserve wines

Aged three years on its lees. Dosage is 9 g/L.

Thiénot Brut Rosé

35% Chardonnay, 40–45% Pinot Noir, 20–25% Meunier

Includes 7% of old-vine Aÿ red wine from the prior year and 35% reserve wines. Aged on lees 2–3 years. Dosage is 10 g/L.

Thiénot Brut Vintage

50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir

A blend of still wines, 50% from Avize, Le Mesnil, Grauves and Vertus blended with 50% Aÿ, Rilly-la-Montagne and Hautvillers. Six years on lees; dosage is 8.5 g/L.

Alain Thiénot Family Range

Thiénot 'Cuvée Alain Thiénot' Vintage

45–60% Chardonnay (Avize, Grauves, Chouilly), 40–55% Pinot Noir (Aÿ and Grand Cru Montagne de Reims)

Aged ten years on lees. Dosage is 9 g/L.

Thiénot 'Cuvée Stanislas' Blanc de Blancs Vintage

100% Chardonnay (usually Cramant, Avize, Chouilly, Le Mesnil)

A rich, creamy style

Thiénot 'Cuvée Garance' Blanc de Rouges Vintage

100% Pinot Noir (Aÿ, Verzy, Verzenay, Mailly, Cumières and Rilly-la-Montagne)

About six years on lees, with a dosage of 10 g/L.

Thiénot 'La Vigne Aux Gamins' Blanc de Blancs Vintage

100% Chardonnay (Avize old vines, single vineyard)

Great personality, not at all with the restraint of the others. Ten years' ageing. Dosage is 10 g/L.

	Champagne 1	Champagne 2
Appearance		
Colour, bubbles - Describe each		
Points out of 3		
Aromas		
Aroma Quality		
Points out of 5 for aromas		
Taste		
Attack/freshness		
Body/texture		
Balance sugar/acid		
Flavour		
Finish/length		
Points out of 6 for taste		
Quality		
Points out of 3		
Preference		
Points out of 3		
Total score out of 20		

	Champagne 3	Champagne 4
Appearance		
Colour, bubbles - Describe each		
Points out of 3		
Aromas		
Aroma Quality		
Points out of 5 for aromas		
Taste		
Attack/freshness		
Body/texture		
Balance sugar/acid		
Flavour		
Finish/length		
Points out of 6 for taste		
Quality		
Points out of 3		
Preference		
Points out of 3		
Total score out of 20		

	Champagne 5	Champagne 6
Appearance		
Colour, bubbles - Describe each		
Points out of 3		
Aromas		
Aroma Quality		
Points out of 5 for aromas		
Taste		
Attack/freshness		
Body/texture		
Balance sugar/acid		
Flavour		
Finish/length		
Points out of 6 for taste		
Quality		
Points out of 3		
Preference		
Points out of 3		
Total score out of 20		