

Worksheet Six

FLAVOUR, CREAMINESS, YEAST INFLUENCE

Champagnes to prepare for the tasting – again, dependent on the number of participants – will include four or five from the list plus a comparison, or ‘reference’, champagne. Remember that the closer the temperature of the champagne is to the ideal of 8–10°C the more flavour there will be, without compromising the freshness. Serving champagne a degree or two less than the recommended 8–10°C compensates for a warm environment.

Alone, choose one from the list which you have not experienced before, and move immediately to the quiz for this chapter.

- » Comparison/reference champagne: Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial NV
plus
- » Billecart-Salmon Rosé NV
- » Mumm de Cramant Blanc de Blancs NV *or* Launois & Fils Cuvée Le Mesnil Quartz NV *or* Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines NV
- » Bollinger Special Cuvée Brut NV
- » Eric Rodez Cuvée des Crayères NV *or* Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut NV
- » Veuve Clicquot Vintage *or* Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage

Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial NV

This is made from the three main grapes of champagne, in varying proportions depending on the year of release, but with the aim of providing a consistent and predictable product to the consumer without bottle variation. If you tasted the most popular champagne in the world long before you read this book, you will have found that Moët & Chandon’s recent style has become more refined and elegant than ever before. The Chardonnay provides citrus/grapefruit notes, the Meunier fruitiness and a light spiciness, while the Pinot Noir adds depth and firmness. Moët say that freshness and fruit elegance are assisted by fermentation in stainless steel tanks. Fifteen months on yeast lees provides delicate and fluffy creaminess plus hints of brioche, fresh bread, croissant and biscuit.

Mumm de Cramant Blanc de Blancs NV

A champagne made with 100% Chardonnay from a special vineyard in Cramant, one of the outstanding villages for Chardonnay. Supple, suave, soft, it is the product not just of its time on lees but of less carbon dioxide (carbonic gas) than most champagnes. Fresh flowers and citrus aromas and flavours derive from the Chardonnay, with light, crisp and biscuity flavours from the lees. All the flavours seem to be enhanced by the low pressure of the effervescence. Although produced from the grapes of a single year, the champagne has only had two years of lees maturation, not three, so no vintage date is marked on the bottle.

Launois & Fils Cuvée Le Mesnil Quartz NV

Also a ‘demi-mousse’ style of four atmospheres, instead of the usual six, Launois Quartz’s grapes are Chardonnay from another outstanding village, Le Mesnil. Aromas of chalk from its vineyard, with citrus and white fruits from the Chardonnay, are repeated as palate flavours. Fermentation occurs in stainless steel to retain freshness and fruit purity. The champagne is bready, nutty and creamy from autolysis.

Besserat de Bellefon Cuvée des Moines Brut NV

This champagne has soft, fresh fruit characters that have been enhanced by an absence of malolactic fermentation, which are then softened by a lower pressure than most champagnes. A classic blend of the three grape varieties (usually 35% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir, 45% Meunier) from a number of villages, the champagne is subtly charming with a texturally lacy and light mouthfeel.

Billecart-Salmon Rosé NV

The Rosé is also made from the three main grapes of champagne, with the addition of 7% red wine from Billecart-Salmon's home village of Mareuil-sur-Aÿ. Aromas of wild strawberries come from the Pinot Noir component as well as the added red wine. Spice comes from the Meunier, lightness and elegance from the Chardonnay. After the first fermentation, the wines are chilled as they settle, and then strained off from the residues. This method of clarification is thought sufficiently delicate to retain the desired delicate fruit characters. Clarification occurs twice and is followed by a three-week cool fermentation. The clean, fresh but sophisticated fruitiness is retained by this first fermentation in stainless steel, followed by malolactic fermentation at a higher temperature. A silky texture comes from the time on lees. The end result is champagne of lacy purity and refined but definite fruit.

Bollinger Special Cuvée Brut NV

A Pinot Noir-dominated blend which shows smoky bacon, mellow spice and dried fruit, indicating the influence of up to 10% of delicious reserve wines that have been vinified (fermented) in old oak barrels, then stored in magnums under light pressure and sealed with cork to allow some natural age development. The remainder is fermented in stainless steel. Nutty, creamy and toasty notes develop from autolysis of three years.

Eric Rodez Cuvée des Crayères NV

A Chardonnay and Pinot Noir blend from five different years. Its characters of chalk, citrus and white flowers derive from the Chardonnay, and red fruits from the Pinot Noir. Largely organic, the rich and powerful fruit from Ambonnay is partly matured in oak for a time. The minute bead of the mousse demonstrates a longer lees time than is usual for a NV.

Marie-Noëlle Ledru Brut NV

Also from Ambonnay. Pinot Noir dominates the 15% Chardonnay, which is used for a touch of lightness. The wine displays abundant fruit characters, with nuances of cherries. Vinified in stainless steel or enamel-lined vats, its plush style is enriched by extended lees time.

Veuve Clicquot Vintage

This wine always sits at an agreeable price-quality point. Grapes are selected from Veuve Clicquot's best vineyards, and vinified in stainless steel to retain the elegance of the fruit. Pinot Noir dominates, and flavours of ripe yellow fruits will abound given time. The extended lees time yields aromas and flavours of hazelnut and breadiness, with a rich creamy texture and developed fruit characters. Check the Veuve Clicquot website for tasting notes about your vintage.

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage

This champagne usually spends seven years on its yeast lees in the cellars where it develops mature, toasty flavours, both sweet and dry, with warm notes of grain and frangipane along with toasted almonds, malt, mocha and light tobacco. Notes of ripe fruits follow: pear, candied citrus, plum, nectarine and white peach. On the palate, the texture is velvety. There is a first impression of creamy roundness. Check the Moët & Chandon website for your vintage's tasting notes.

The first champagne sets the example.

	Champagne	Dominant Flavours	Creaminess	Autolytic Quality
1	Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial NV	Grapefruit, mouth-filling fruit especially white fruits. Savoury. Lightly spicy.	Lightly creamy.	Biscuity, wheaten, brioche, croissant, fresh bread.
2	Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé NV			
3	Mumm de Cramant Blanc de Blancs NV or alternative			
4	Bollinger Special Cuvée NV			
5	Eric Rodez Cuvée des Crayères NV or alternative			
6	Veuve Clicquot Vintage or alternative			

How well do the aromas match the flavours?

Does the rosé smell and taste of berries or red fruits?

Write a one-word flavour summary for each champagne.

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Regarding intensity, is each (or your single) champagne: fine, light, discreet, smooth, comforting, mouth-filling, sumptuous, luscious, opulent, mature, solid, powerful, or even invasive? Place the champagne in order of intensity:

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Which champagne’s aromas match most closely with its flavours?

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When you taste the third champagne, check for creaminess across the other champagnes. Do you notice how particularly soft in the mouth the third champagne feels?

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Considering the third champagne, is there creaminess from the fruit of matured Chardonnay, which is usually of the more buttery, even oily, type?

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Do you notice the softness from 4 atmospheres of pressure in Champagne 3, as opposed to all the other champagnes, which have 6 atmospheres?

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Which champagne is toastiest from long autolysis?

Your order of favourites:

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