



Distinctive Champagne

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



HAVE YOU EVER wondered why the actual bottles for so many of the highest volume Champagne brands – the so called Grand Marques – are identical? Take away the label and foil and Moët & Chandon Imperial looks just like Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label which looks just like ... well, you get the idea. As you might suspect/expect (since I'm asking the question) that there is a reason. That reason is called "sur lattes" and it is one of the dirty little secrets of the grand marque Champagne business.

The grand marques are the famous houses of Champagne that control over two-thirds of the Champagne sold world-wide. They are the Moët & Chandons, Veuve Clicquots, Taittingers, Mumm's, Roederers, Perrier-Jouets, Bollingers, Piper-Heidsiecks, Pommerys, etc. They are not the Nicholas Feuillattes (a co-op) or the Jean Laurents, Pierre Peters, Bonnaires, or Lancelot Royers (all growers or recoltant manipulants). The big houses are the worldwide brands of Champagne. These companies, some public and some private, built Champagne the place, have established Champagne the wine, and promoted Champagne the lifestyle. Some of these grand marque houses are huge (Moët & Chandon, Veuve Clicquot, Perrier-Jouet, Mumm) and some are smaller (Pol Roger, Henriot, Bollinger). All these houses make a range of styles and most all have a tete de cuvee or "luxury cuvee" that they offer as a flagship wine (Dom Perignon, Cristal, Comtes de Champagne, La Grande Dame, etc.). Two – Krug and Salon – operate only at the luxury cuvee end of the business with no products under \$150 per bottle.

Many of the grand marques make splendid wines from their own grapes and grapes they purchase. However, some (most?) of the grand marque producers don't make all the wine they sell. All the grand marque producers are negociant-manipulant (NM) producers so they all can buy grapes but they also can buy must (juice) and wine. While all the grand marque producers buy grapes from independent growers, many of them also buy unfermented musts and even fermented base wines from co-ops and small growers that they blend with their own base wines to form their cuvees. Buying only grapes gives the house the most control and is best from the standpoint of quality potential. Buying musts can be more convenient but gives a bit less control. Buying base wines can work out as long as they buy and blend carefully and manage the rest of the process themselves. If a house buys from the same areas where they grow their own grapes, the blended wines should be compatible and the finished product may even show some specificity of place.



The dirty little secret of grand marque Champagne is that there is another form of buying wine: some of the big houses buy sur latte - which is to say that they buy nearly finished Champagnes in the bottle (from the co-ops and some growers) that they finish (disgorge and dose) and label and then sell as if they made them start to finish. This can lead to several very different products being sold under the same label as if they were the same wine when all they are likely to have in common is maybe a generally similar blend of grape varieties (cepage) and the same house dosage. Even if the quality is consistent (which is unlikely), the taste will not be. Almost all sur latte wines are sold as basic Brut Non-Vintage (NV) or are further sweetened up to Extra Dry NV, Sec NV, or Demi-Sec NV. In general, these are bottom-of-the-line (or "entry level" in marketing speak) products ... but they make up the lion's share of the Champagne business. Contrary to the "grower geek" gospel, they can even be pretty good. Generally though, they are inconsistent and dosed on the sweeter side so as to hide both flaws and dissimilarities.

So how do you know if the grand marque Brut NV or Extra Dry you are buying was a sur latte purchase? The simple answer is "You don't." Some of the grand marque producers say that they don't buy sur latte. That list includes Henriot, Bollinger, Pol Roger, Taittinger, and Roederer. Most of the other houses won't deny that they buy sur latte but they downplay it and no one likes to talk about it. To sell sur latte wines or not is an ongoing debate within the grand marques. The best marques say they don't.

From where I stand, the practice of sur lattes being sold under, say the Veuve Clicquot label doesn't seem all that different from a company in southern China selling a fraudulent purse as Louis Vuitton – except that in this case it is the company who owns the brand that is perpetrating the deception and they are demanding full price for the lesser goods. You might note that Veuve Clicquot is owned by LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) so that analogy is particularly apt.

So, let's say it is important to you that you get a high quality, authentic product made by the company which is marketing it as their own. How can you be sure you aren't getting a sur latte? There are several ways to make sure that your bottle of Champagne was actually made by - rather than just finished by - the producer whose name is on the label. You can buy only from those "NM" (negoçant-manipulant) producers who say they don't buy sur lattes ... and trust that they are telling the truth. You can buy only magnums as all Champagne magnums are required by regulation to be made in-house. Or you can buy "distinctive Champagnes."

Distinctive Champagnes? These are Champagnes found either in the one-off bottles or with growers' labels or both. The one-offs or "odd bottles" – which is to say bottles other than the standard green basic Champagne bottle – make sur lattes impossible. These other-than-standard bottles with their odd shapes and colors must be used from the beginning and so sur lattes don't apply. Or you can buy grower's estate bottled champagnes (also known as recoltant manipulant or "RM" champagnes and sometimes referred to as "Farmer Fizz") which are produced start to finish by the grower from grapes he himself grows.

If you buy the one-offs or the farmer fizz, you know who made your wine. Here's a list with some notes and commentary on Spec's portfolio of one-offs and farmer fizz. The "code" column tells you how it fits the criteria. "RM" indicates a recolte manipulant or grower Champagne. "NMD" indicates a negociant manipulant Champagne in a one-off or "distinctive" bottle. "TM" indicates an NM Champagne in the standard bottle that I have strong reason to believe is from a producer who does not sell sur lattes. In this case, TM stands for "trust me."

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Champagne By-The-Numbers

All Champagne producers have a number assigned to them and all Champagne labels have that producer number on them. It starts with two letters that are followed by a series of numbers. Usually in very small print and sometimes effectively hidden in fancy design, the number is nonetheless there. That two letter pre-fix tells you what kind of producer (negociant, récoltant, co-op, etc.) made the wine. Here's what those initials mean.

NM: Négociant manipulant. These companies buy grapes or juice, or wine and process the wine. Many also grow grapes. All the grand marques are "NM" producers.

CM: Coopérative de manipulation. Co-operatives that make wines from the growers who are members, with all the grapes pooled together. The wines are sold under the co-op's brand name. Nicolas Feuillatte is a "CM" producer.

RM: Récoltant manipulant. A grower that also makes wine from his own grapes (with a maximum of 5% purchased grapes allowed). These Farmer Fizz producers are the Champagne equivalent of the domaine in Burgundy. Co-operative members who make their own second (bottle) fermentations but take their bottles to be disgorged at the co-op may now label themselves as RM instead of RC.

SR: Société de récoltants. An association of growers making a shared Champagne but who are not a co-operative. Very rarely seen. Andre Clouet carries an "SR" number.

RC: Récoltant coopérateur. A member of a co-operative selling Champagne produced by the co-operative under his own name and label. Rarely seen in the US.

MA: Marque auxiliaire or Marque d'acheteur. A brand name unrelated to the producer or grower; the name is owned by someone else, for example a supermarket. This is seen on "Buyer's Own Brands".

ND: Négociant distributeur. A wine merchant (not a producer) selling under his own name.

THE LIST

ANDRE CLOUET produces high quality, rich cuvées with well-extracted Pinot-dominant flavors. - Tom Stevenson, World Encyclopedia of Champagne

NMD Andre Clouet "Grand Reserve" Brut NV 12x750ML \$41.99 \$472.87
This 100% Pinot Noir, 100% Grand Cru, 100% Bouzy, estate-bottled Champagne offers a Bollinger-esque style with lots of yeasty, toasty, minerally character along with juicy red fruit accented with subtle citrus. Notes of white earth and minerals. Long and complex, delicious and satisfying. Excellent. BS: 94.

NMD Andre Clouet Brut Rose NV 12x750ML \$49.99 \$563.64
A cuvee of 92% Pinot Noir fermented as white Champagne blended with 8% Bouzy Rouge (the famous but rare red wine from the village of Bouzy), This is supple and juicy with red fruit accented with subtle earth. It hints at exotic spice with fine perfume and a balancing core of lemon acidity. Its toastiness emerges in the mouth. Great feel. Yum. Excellent. BS: 94.

NMD Andre Clouet Silver Brut Nature NV 12x750ML \$41.99 \$472.87

This 100% Pinot Noir all from the Grand Cru village of Bouzy is as vinous (wine-like) as Champagne gets. It is made from ripe, high quality grapes grown at a single site and is fermented in neutral oak barrels to develop more flavor and richness. After the Champagne process, the wine is finished with no dosage. This is the sort of "naked" Champagne that would readily show whatever flaws it had. Instead it is rich and vinous (winey) tasting with a mix of citrus and dark fruit accented with toast, yeast, earth, and minerals. Classic and delicious. Excellent. BS: 94.

RM Aubry Brut NV 12x750ML \$46.93 \$528.50
 TM Ayala Majeur Brut NV 6x750ML \$53.30 \$300.12

BILLECART SALMON, aka "Billy Goat", offers tete de cuvee style at prices between Brut NV and really good vintage.

NMD Billecart Salmon Brut Reserve - NV 12x750ML \$50.35 \$567.01

NMD Billecart Salmon Brut Rose NV 12x750ML \$80.30 \$904.31

BONNAIRE, based in the village of Cramant in the Cote de Blancs, was the first Grower Champagne Spec's carried. Not long after we put Bonnaire in, we started to get Egly Ouriet. And Jean Laurent.

RM Bonnaire Brut NV 6x750ML \$46.99 \$265.88

Balanced, fresh, elegant 100% Chardonnay Champagne (from all Grand Cru vineyards located in Cramant on the Cote de Blancs) with fine fruit showing lots of ripe lemon with notes of pear and apple and a nice toasty character. Almost juicy but still fresh and focused with plenty of chalk and mineral, good mousse (bubbles), fine length, a super texture, and great flavor. Perfect Aperitif. Excellent. BS: 93.

RM Boulard Cuvee Rose NV 12x750ML \$38.25 \$430.71

NMD Bruno Paillard Rose NV 12x750ML \$53.30 \$600.24

RM Camille Saves Carte Blanche Brut Premier Cru NV 12x750ML \$47.39 \$533.63

RM Camille Saves Rose Brut Grand Cru NV 12x750ML \$61.99 \$699.21

RM Chartogne Taillet Cuvee St Anne 12x750ML \$43.69 \$491.61

Blended "essentially 50-50 Pinot Noir and Chardonnay 'with the rest (Pinot Meunier)' as Chartognes put it" 40% from the 2001 vintage and 60% from the 2000 vintage (disgorged in February of 2005) and utilizing a 1% dosage, this is toasty and yeasty with good red fruit with notes of earth and chalk. It is not too idiosyncratic so a newbie to farmer fizz should feel at home. Excellent. BS: 92+.

TM Delamotte Brut De Mesnil (6/cs) NV 6x750ML \$65.99 \$369.11

Demoiselle Champagne is a marque owned by Vranken-Pommery but treated as a separate brand with its own separate production facilities and vineyards. Each of the Demoiselle wines comes in a unique proprietary bottle proving it was made by Demoiselle. The reason we carry these wines is they are authentic and delicious expressions of both Champagne and a legitimate Chardonnay-dominant house style. The wines are different than the Vranken or Pommery wines. Due to a large purchase, we have been able to lower the prices on the Demoiselle Brut Tete de Cuvee and the Demoiselle Grand Cuvee Rosé while we were also able to bring in some alternate sizes (also very well priced) and the exceptional mature luxury cuvee Demoiselle Brut Millesime 1er cru 1996.

NMD Demoiselle Brut Premier Cru 1996 12x750ML
\$89.99 \$1,013.38

This is the Demoiselle luxury cuvee. We tasted both this 1996 and the 2000 and chose the 1996 because of its extra development and richness. The 2000 is also excellent and we will likely carry it at some point after the 1996 is sold out. It is just that the 1996 is a rare find that is drinking beautifully. Tech: 12% Alcohol. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir exclusively from premier cru vineyards fermented using Methode Champenoise and aged 60 months on the yeasts. Straw in color with a hint of gold, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics. Offers developed fruit and toasty bread that is very well integrated with the chalky mineral component. Very long finish. Satisfying, complete, and delicious; lovely-in-the-mouth. Richer and quite developed with pure, precise, almost smokey flavors. If you have never tasted a great Champagne with more than ten year's aging, this is a beautiful one to try. Really Excellent. BS: 95+.

NMD Demoiselle Brut Rose NV 12x750ML
\$48.75 \$549.00

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir de Bouzy produced using Methode Champenoise and aged 36 months on the lees (the rosé color comes from a small percentage of the Pinot Noir being made as a red wine and added to the blend just before the "Champenization"). Pale salmon - onion skin in color, bright and clear and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and a long, refreshing finish. Earthy with chalk and darker earth. The fruit is in the red cherry and citrus range with grace notes of black pepper and plenty of toasty yeast. Elegant and integrated, satisfying; lovely-in-the-mouth. Almost exotic and quite delicious. Rich and rounded with the balance to go with food but all-the-while retaining its elegance. Excellent. BS: 92.

NMD Demoiselle Brut NV 12x750ML \$39.88 \$449.16

This is Demoiselle's basic Brut NV but as I note, it is much better than "basic." Tech Note: 12% Alcohol. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir fermented using Methode Champenoise with 36 months aging on the yeast. Straw in color, bright, clear and sparkling. Offers refreshing acidity under white and yellow citrus and tree fruit (lemon and green apple fruit with hint of peach), clean toasty yeast notes, and dusty-minerally terroir. It is long, lively, and refreshing with a clean finish. Elegant, fresh, and focused; alive-in-the-mouth. Excellent. BS: 91+VHR.

NMD Deutz Brut Classic NV 6x750ML
\$47.49 \$261.07

NMD Diamant Bleu Brut NV 12x750ML
\$55.90 \$629.52

RM Egly Ouriet Blanc De Noirs Grand Cru NV
12x750ML \$100.83 \$1,135.48

Tech Note: 100% Pinot Noir, from the oldest vines of the estate on a special single vineyard named Les Crayères (chalk). The terroir is 10-11 inches of real soil on the surface, and then solid chalk. With this Blanc de Noir, Egly Ouriet is trying to resuscitate the true taste of the Montagne de Reims region the way it tasted 50 years ago before they blended in 25-40% Chardonnay. Although it is not indicated on the label, this is 100% 2002. It was 100% barrel fermented, then bottled, re-fermented and aged 4.3 years on the yeasts. Pale gold straw with green highlights. Pie crust and graham cracker and very toasty with notes of lemony citrus and red and black fruit essences accented with spice and chalk. The wood gives richness rather than flavor. Deep and rich but still fresh. Very dry with the lemony citrus character running through to the end. Really Excellent. BS: 96.

RM Egly Ouriet Blanc De Noirs Grand Cru NV 12x750ML \$100.83 \$1,135.48

Tech Note: 100% Pinot Noir, from the oldest vines of the estate on a special single vineyard named Les Crayères (chalk). The terroir is 10-11 inches of real soil on the surface, and then solid chalk. With this Blanc de Noir, Egly Ouriet is trying to resuscitate the true taste of the Montagne de Reims region the way it tasted 50 years ago before they blended in 25-40% Chardonnay. Although it is not indicated on the label, this is 100% 2002. It was 100% barrel fermented, then bottled, re-fermented and aged 4.3 years on the yeasts. Dosage: 2 g/l. Pale gold straw color with green highlights. Pie crust and graham cracker and very toasty with notes of lemony citrus and red and black fruit essences accented with spice and chalk. The wood gives richness rather than flavor. Deep and rich but still fresh. Very dry with the lemony citrus character running through to the end. Really Excellent. BS: 96.

RM Egly Ouriet Brut Tradition Grand Cru NV 12x750ML
\$63.75 \$717.95

Tech Note: Made from grapes grown on 35-40 year old vines. Half of the cuvee is from 2004 and 50% Reserve wine (of which 20% is 2003, 20% is 2002 and 10% 2001). 20% of the blend was barrel fermented. The base wines were unfiltered and unfiltered. Pale yellow straw color, with a very fine mousse. Fresh and yeasty with a bit of honey. Great precision and purity. Lots of lemony citrus toast and earth. Vinous and complex. Excellent. BS: 93.

RM Eric Rodez Brut Millesimes 99/00
12x750ML \$76.43 \$860.69

RM Eric Rodez Cuvee des Crayeros NV
12x750ML \$38.99 \$441.56

RM Gaston Chiquet Brut Tradition NV 12x750ML
\$47.39 \$532.90

This is a later disgorgement (12/07) of the second cuvee we shipped last year. "Our Champagnes have been sold too young," said Nicolas, "and we wanted to start offer-ing something more mature." This is 78% 2004, 6% '02, 13% '01 and 3% '98, and as always 45% Meunier, 35% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir. It's just lovely, maybe a lit-tle more rôti than usual, more of the barley-cracker, quite streamlined, and drier-seem-ing than is typical for this cuvee. - Terry Theise

RM Gaston Chiquet Rose Brut NV 12x750ML
\$49.83 \$561.15

RM Geoffroy Cuvee Expression NV 12x750ML
\$44.63 \$502.59

Disgorged 12/07, and half-half '05-'04, and this cuvee continues to change, to become more studiously serious. It's down to 39% Meunier and up to 37% PN and 24% Chardonnay, with 12% vinified in seasoned wood; it's cool and a little grassy in the '04 style; drier (8 grams RS) and less effusive than before, but the length is substantial; there'll be more straw and hay when it fills out, but this departs from the easy succu- lent style of old. I still like it! - Terry Theise

TM GH Martel Brut Prestige NV 6x750ML \$37.14 \$209.13
TM GH Martel Demi Sec NV 6x750ML \$37.14 \$209.13

RM Gimonnet Cuvee Gastronom 2004 12x750ML
\$55.47 \$624.69

This is a wine with slightly less mousse than usual, specifically to be better at the table; such things were known as Crémants until the Champenoise had to relinquish the term in order to prevent anyone else from using Methode Champenoise on their labels. It's always been a vintage-wine but not THE vintage wine. Disgorged 12/07, this is 49% Chouilly (for its "elegance"), 39.8% Cuis, and 11.2% Cramant (97-year-old vines, for its "plumpness"). 2004 can be green and almost catty, but this one is all mint and sweet Sencha, with a slim spine of chalk and white lilac and an amazing tertiary complexity that rides a cool wave of green and sea-air into a finish of herbal sweetness. - Terry Theise

RM Guy Larmandier Cremant Gr. Cru Blanc de Blancs
12x750ML \$47.99 \$536.91

The Larmandiers own 7.8 hectares. All vineyards are situated in the heart of the fabled Côte des Blancs, specifically within the Grand Cru villages of Cramant (3.4 hectares) and Chouilly (1.4 hectares) and the 95% rated Premier Cru village of Vertus (3 hectares). With the exception of one-half hectare in Vertus planted to Pinot Noir, all vineyards are dedicated to Chardonnay. The Cremant Grand Cru is the product of a special selection of sites within this top-rated village. Also aged at least 3 years on the lees, this cuvée is 100% Chardonnay.

RM Hebrart Special Club 2002 6x750ML \$63.70 \$358.68
60% Pinot Noir (Mareuil only), 40% Chardonnay (Oiry and Chouilly including the Mont Aigu we also see from Gimmonnet); vines average 40 years old; disgorged 12/06 – and this will be great Champagne when it emerges from disgorgement; it's the most powerful and backward of the '02s I've had, but as it grows in the glass its umami deepens and a profundity emerges. – Terry Theise

RM Jean Lallement Brut NV 12x750ML
\$60.58 \$682.22

RM Jean Lallement Rose Brut NV 12x750ML
\$62.30 \$701.55

RM Jean Laurent Blanc de Blanc NV 12x750ML
\$39.99 \$450.77

RM Jean Laurent Blanc de Noir Brut NV 12x750ML
\$36.66 \$412.85

This is a fresh, juicy, flavorful, ripe fruit oriented 100% Pinot Noir Champagne with notes of yeast, minerals, and lemon drops and subtle red fruit (strawberry). It is long, focused, and lively in the mouth with good weight, and a nice mousse. Solid and delicious with a fine rich feel. Finishes clean and dry. Super with food. Excellent. BS: 92+.

RM Jean Laurent Brut Rose NV 12x750ML
\$38.99 \$439.05

RM Jose Dhondt Blanc De Blancs Brut NV 12x750ML
\$47.14 \$530.85

RM Jose Dhondt Mes Vieilles Vignes Bl de Blancs 2005
12x750ML \$66.91 \$753.52



RM Lancelot Royer Cuvee Chevaliers NV 12x750ML
\$47.98 \$540.36

Disgorged in September of 2006, this 100% Cote de Blancs Grand Cru, 100% Chardonnay cuvee is 50% from the 2001 vintage and 50% from the 2002 vintage with the younger component spending some time in barrels, this spends about three-and-a-half years on the yeasts. There is butter, spice, toast, lemon, and lime here along with a beam of chalky mineral. Really lasts in the mouth. Somehow rich and crisp at the same time. Really Excellent. BS: 95.

RM Lancelot Royer Cuvee de Reserve NV 12x750ML
\$40.30 \$453.84

This 100% Chardonnay cuvee includes some wine from the village of Bisseuil (1er Cru) but the rest of the cuvee is 100% Grand Cru from the Cote de Blancs (the cellar is in Cramant). It was disgorged in June of 2006 and is made with a base wine from 2003 vintage (40%) and the reserve wines (60%) coming from many vintages all of which are barrel aged. It spent about two-and-a-half years on the yeasts. The result is a lively juicy developed but still fresh tasting Champagne with good richness. While not as dry as some grower's Champagnes, this is delicious and easy drinking. Lots of flavor and character, it is sweet with fruit (Apple, peach, lemon) and has a hint of honey (from the reserve wines?). Finishes clean and crisp. Excellent. BS: 93+.

NMD Louis De Sacy 67% Brut Original NV 12x750ML
\$28.47 \$320.62

NMD Louis De Sacy Grand Cru NV 12x750ML
\$28.47 \$320.62

NMD Louis De Sacy Grand Soir 2001 6x750ML
\$64.50 \$361.20

NMD Louis De Sacy Rose NV 12x750ML
\$33.23 \$374.20

RM Pierre Peters Cuvee de Reserve Brut NV 12x750ML
\$49.39 \$550.37

Disgorged 10/07, as is apparent from the almost invisible lot # on the front label. This cuvée is perhaps more vintage-sensitive than many others in this book, but Rudolph Peters explained to me they have been running a kind of modified "solera" since 1999—this is 65% 2005 and 35% last-year's cuvée; it shows the classic white-flower flavor along with generous chalkiness and orange-blossom; palate is fluffy and extroverted, with the 2005-class apparent; salty and doughy, with a precise jasmine and chalk finish. It's also much drier than this wine used to be; there were years it had 12g/l. RS and this one has half that. As always, two-thirds Mesnil and one-third Cramant-Avize-Oger-Chouilly. – Terry Theise

RM Marniquet Brut Tradition NV 12x750ML \$30.99 \$343.95
Located in the Vallee de la Marne, Marniquet is a grower we are just starting to work with. The blend is 50% Pinot Meunier, 35% Chardonnay, and 15% Pinot Noir. The wine is toasty, fruity, fresh, and just a bit funky. Lots of "biscuit" character balances lemon and baked apple fruit with nuances of white chalky clay terroir. Long and lively, Very tasty. Excellent. BS: 91.

TM Milan Carte Blanche NV 12x750ML \$48.65 \$547.83
TM Milan Cuvee Tendresse NV 12x750ML \$62.40 \$702.72

Pierre Morlet is a small family owned negociant Champagne house operating more like a Recoltant Manipulant. The Morlet family vineyards are comprised of over thirty parcels totaling forty acres in Avenay-Val-d'Or (Premier Cru), Ay (Grand Cru), Bisseuil (Premier Cru), and Mutigny (Premier Cru). These vineyard blocks are situated next to parcels that produce the super premium cuvées for such famous Champagne houses as Bollinger, Krug, Moët & Chandon, Mumm, Pommery, and Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin. In Ay, the prestigious vineyard La Côte aux Enfants of Bollinger, is adjacent to the Morlet family's Gilbertin. Morlet operates as a Negociant because they do buy some grapes to supplement their own production. According to the family, they buy no wine, only grapes.

NMD Pierre Morlet Brut Rose NV 12x750ML \$43.23 \$486.78
Tech: 12% Alcohol. A blend of 74% Pinot Noir and 26% Chardonnay with components from the Morlet family's terroirs of Premiers Crus Avenay-Val-d'Or, Bisseuil and Mutigny and of Grand Cru Ay, it is partially fermented in French oak "demi-muids" (500-liter barrels). Yellow straw in color, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with balanced acidity. Yeasty-biscuity with developed citrusy fruit and mineral earth. Very long finish. Complete, satisfying, delicious; rich and lovely in the mouth. Excellent. BS: 92.

NMD Pierre Morlet Grand Reserve Premier Cru NV 12x750ML \$38.99 \$439.20
Tech: 12% Alcohol. A blend of 74% Pinot Noir and 26% Chardonnay with components from the Morlet family's terroirs of Premiers Crus Avenay-Val-d'Or, Bisseuil and Mutigny and of Grand Cru Ay, it is partially fermented in French oak "demi-muids" (500-liter barrels). Yellow straw in color, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with balanced acidity. Yeasty-biscuity with developed citrusy fruit and mineral earth. Very long finish. Complete, satisfying, delicious; rich and lovely in the mouth. Excellent. BS: 92.

RM Pierre Peters Cuvee de Reserve Brut NV 12x750ML \$49.39 \$550.37
Disgorged 10/07, as is apparent from the almost invisible lot # on the front label. This cuvée is perhaps more vintage-sensitive than many others, but Rudolph Peters explained to me they have been running a kind of modified "solera" since 1999—this is 65% 2005 and 35% last-year's cuvée; it shows the classic white-flower flavor along with generous chalkiness and orange-blossom; palate is fluffy and extroverted, with the 2005-class apparent; salty and doughy, with a precise jasmine and chalk finish. It's also much drier than this wine used to be; there were years it had 12g/l. RS and this one has half that. As always, two-thirds Mesnil and one-third Cramant-Avize-Oger-Chouilly. – Terry Theise

RM Pierre Peters Rose Brut NV 12x750ML \$66.99 \$755.42

RM Roger Coulon Brut Tradition 1er Cru NV 12x750ML \$51.45 \$579.45
A blend of 50% Pinot Meunier, 25% Pinot Noir, and 25% Chardonnay from vineyards located in the 1er Crus of Vrigny, Pargny les Reims and Coulommès la Montagne with an average vine age of 38 years. All of the hand-harvested grapes and plots are vinified separately, and a pneumatic press is used. All red grapes are placed into stainless steel vats, while the chardonnay is placed in barrel. Nine months later the wines are blended and put into bottle for the long aging and secondary fermentation process. It is aged 3 years in bottle before disgorging.

RM Roger Coulon Grand Reserve 1er Cru Brut NV 12x750ML \$54.99 \$620.59
 NMD Ruinart Blanc de Blanc Brut NV 6x750ML \$37.23 \$206.96
 NMD Ruinart Rose 6x750ML \$70.92 \$394.20
 RM Serveaux Fils, Blanc de Noirs Brut NV 12x750ML \$59.68 \$672.12
 RM Serveaux Fils Carte Noire Brut NV 12x750ML \$43.28 \$487.37
 RM Taitel Millesime Brut 2000 12x750ML \$60.99 \$688.08
 RM Thierry Massin Brut NV 12x750ML \$37.81 \$416.25

The Massin vineyards overlook the village of Ville Sur Arce. Limestone soils produce exceptional Pinot Noir, which is both structured and elegant. The Massins practice culture raisonnée meaning they work parcel by parcel. Wines are vinified and bottled at the estate and spend three years ageing in the cellars. Brother and sister Thierry and Dominique took over the family estate in Aube in 1977. The Massin family have been independent Champagne producers for 30 years, making them pioneers among grower Champagne vintners. 75% Pinot Noir, 25% Chardonnay, Côte des Bar. A touch of yeast and floral qualities on the nose. A little richer in the mouth with plum and herbal flavors. Very focused and precise with a powerful attack. Mineral notes on the finish. Delicious ...

RM Vilmart Cuvee Grand Cellier Brut NV 12x750ML \$68.25 \$768.60
50% 2005 and 25% each of '04-'03. 70/30 blend of Chard/PN, aged 10 months in Foudres and disgorged 10/07. This wine continues getting better, amazingly. Maybe it's the creamy 2005, but the grace and stylishness here are unprecedented, and there's a seamlessness that used to take years to show. At this point it's in the family of the vintage-wines, though still with its signature flavors of saffron, brioche and lobster stock. – Terry Theise ✨

