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# CHAMPAGNE 101

## “All you need to know about this region”

### CHAMPAGNE, the outlier in market dynamics

Champagne is economically one of most successful wine regions. LVMH, Pernod Ricard, Laurent Perrier, Artemis are just a few listed French companies that make a mint with selling Champagne. At the same time, of all the top wine regions, Champagne, until very recently, is the one that has been the least sought after by wine collectors. This comes from the fact that most people, even wine lovers, mainly drink entry-level Champagne throughout their life at social functions - weddings, cocktails, birthdays. These “industrially” produced bubbles from Veuve Cliquot, Moët, Lanson, Feuillatte, etc., that fill the rows of supermarkets are indeed uninteresting wines - yes, a little better than Prosecco, but not much. They cost around 40€ while 15€ would be an appropriate price, on par with bottle fermented peers like Crémant, Cava, Franciacorta. Thus, huge money is to be made in Champagne especially because it is cropped at a staggering 10-12 t/ha (which yields ca. 70 hl/ha). For comparison, in Burgundy, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir is cropped at 30-45 hl/ha, with top producers often as low as 15-25 hl/ha. Only Champagne, due to the marketing genius of linking the beverage to celebrations, achieves the feat to sell a low-end wine at 40€. Any other wine like this would otherwise end up in the “Jacob’s Creek and Yellow Tail category” and sell for 10€ or less. So, the first recommendation of this report is:

**Do not buy entry level Champagne;  
It is far too expensive for what it is!**

If you are looking for entry level Champagne-method wines at lower cost but same quality, buy Crémant. Now let’s talk about the high-end, the gastronomically interesting Champagnes. In this category we’ll find the offerings of high quality “**Grower-Producers**” (Growers) like Selosse, Egly-Ouriet, Agrapart, Larmandier-Bernier and the **prestige cuvées** of the **large Houses** like Dom Perignon, Cristal. The latter category was until recently also avoided by aficionados because they are too closely associated with a

night club visit. This is actually good news and leads to the nice fact that top quality Champagne often costs below 200€ still. In Bordeaux First Growths are around 500€ and in Burgundy you are quickly into four digits. This is also due to the volume. As a very rough reference, a prestige Cuvée Champagne is produced in volumes of 500k bottles, a Bordeaux First Growth 100k bottles, a Burgundy Grand Cru 5k bottles. Therein lies the vast difference in the supply/demand dynamics. Grower Cuvées or single plot Champagne like Clos des Goisses are more like 10-50k bottles, while Dom Perignon is a whopping 5-8mio (Moët makes close to 30 mio bottles p.a.). That is an astonishing amount for a luxury wine and one has to congratulate Moët that they consistently achieve high quality with Dom Perignon.



An interesting proof point that high-end Champagne has not been collected by aficionados comes from the fact that old vintages are virtually inexistent in the secondary market (auctions/brokers).

Try to find a 70 or 80ies bottle of your favorite vintage Champagne and you will set yourself up for the goose chase of a lifetime despite half a million of bottles once having existed. Finding a Mouton Rothschild from that era is an easy task. One look into [Wine-Searcher](#) gives you a long list of merchants and auction houses. These are bottles that were once bought by collectors and cellared. Many of them have collections that are too big and when the owners grow older they offload part of their collection to the secondary market or when they die, their children do. There are nearly zero bottles of aged Champagne in these cellars. That is why they hardly exist on the secondary market and if they exist, prices are very high. This brings me to my second recommendation:

**When a new vintage of a Prestige Cuvée is released, buy a case and store it as if it was Bordeaux!**

The price usually is lower on release since there is a big quantity of bottles hitting the market. Then it gets consumed and disappears gradually. This strategy will give you 20+ years of drinking pleasure or if you end up not liking it, it is an easy sale at twice the price. A strategy that used to work for Bordeaux, but no longer does. Unfortunately, Covid has also changed this to a certain degree. Wine lovers were stuck at home and have upgraded their drinking quality for Champagne as well. This has led to many new lovers of high-end Champagne and prices have risen by more than 50% between 2020-2022, on account of [LIV-EX](#). Prices of growers who produce small quantities have risen even more. Selse, Egly-Ouriet, Ulysse Collin went up 200-400%. Finally, a broader group of wine aficionados has realized that aged high-quality Champagne is one of the most complex white wines in the world, on par with Montrachet, Riesling GG & Co.



Aus "Champagne: The growing secondary market for luxury" @[LIV-EX](#)

## Houses and Growers

As we now understand the supply / demand dynamics, there is another structural element that needs to be explored before going into the technicalities of the wines itself. The outlier number two in Champagne is that the people owning the vineyards are not the ones making the wine. The large Champagne houses own a mere 15% of the vineyards. The rest is owned by 15'000 families growing grapes (or hiring someone to do it) and selling their grapes to the Houses and Cooperatives. Families who both grow grapes and make Champagne are called *récoltant-manipulant* (or in short growers).

The “**Grower Champagne**” group only produces ca. 25% of the 300 mio. Champagne bottles, large Houses ca. 60%, Cooperatives 15%, so almost the other way round than the vineyard ownership. Why is this a relevant fact for the consumer? Because most consumers only know the brands of the large houses, but the main innovations and some of the most interesting Champagnes today come from the Growers. This phenomenon gained momentum especially in the last 15 years, when a younger generation gradually took the helm. Before their brand is established, they have to put high quality at low prices into the bottle, which is of course attractive to the consumer. They also often experiment with zero dosage, single vineyards, forgotten grape varieties, etc. This leads to my third recommendation:

**Familiarize yourself with the best Growers  
to discover new names at attractive prices!**

Again, you will drink well and diversely applying this recommendation and the prices can only go in one direction due to scarcity of these bottles.

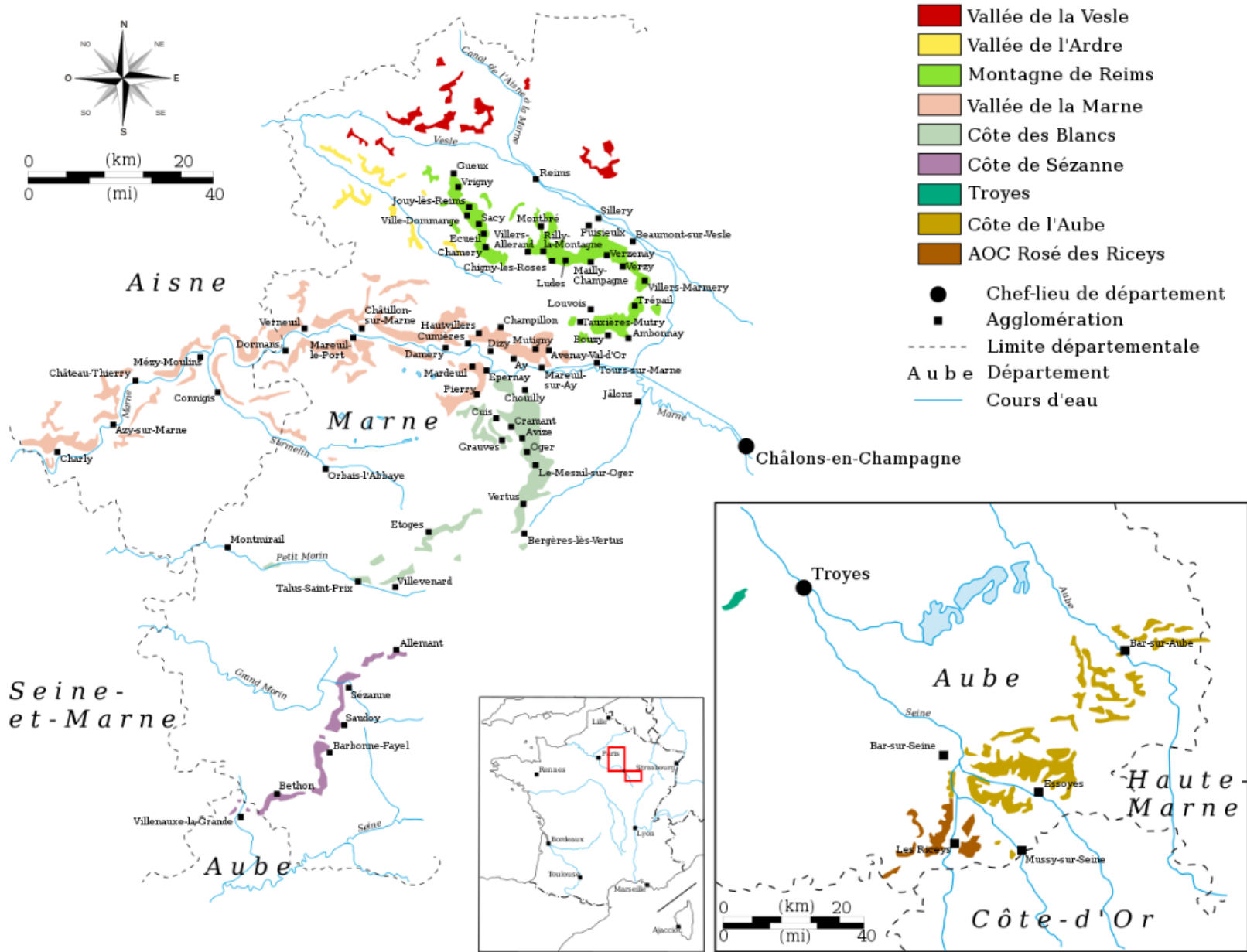
## The geographic region – The minimum you need to know

The Champagne AOC covers 34'300 hectares of vineyards, slightly larger than Burgundy and a third of the size of Bordeaux. Production is 300 mio bottles p.a.<sup>1</sup> Its location 100 miles northeast of Paris in Reims/Epernay is at the northernmost limits of the cold tolerance for grape growing. The region second major distinguishing feature is **its dual climate**, which is predominantly oceanic but with continental tendencies. Champagne receives a shabby 1'650 average annual hours of sunshine compared with 1'900 in Burgundy, 2'100 in Bordeaux and more than 2'500 in Provence. The growth rate is accordingly limited, giving the grapes the acidity that Champagne requires, but also creates occasional problems with under-ripeness. Making normal wine in Champagne is not a good idea, but for bubbles where you have a second fermentation and add sugar it is ideal. For that reason, even more so with global warming, Italian and Spanish sparkling wines struggle to achieve the freshness and aromatic depth of a cool climate place while England is now increasingly well positioned.

Since the vast majority of Champagne are blends of different grapes and locations, individual vineyards play a less important role than elsewhere. Surprisingly, there is only one appellation for entire Champagne unlike other vine regions where you have sub-appellations like Pauillac, Saint-Emilion or in the case of Barolo and Burgundy even down to the vineyard level. Another particular fact is, the ranking of Grand Cru and Premier Cru is given to entire villages, not vineyards. In total, 17 villages have Grand Cru entitlement and 42 are ranked Premier Cru. In short, memorizing vineyard sites is not something you need to do in extenso in Champagne. The only geographical fact that one should retain are the five big regions and their speciality:

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<sup>1</sup> See also CIVC Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin Champagne ([www.champagne.fr](http://www.champagne.fr))



Wine-growing areas and wine villages of the Champagne region

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1. **The Montagne de Reims:**

Its soils are chalk-based, with incisions of loam, lignite, clay, sand, silt, and marl. It contains nine Grands Cru villages and Pinot Noir is the main grape cultivated here.

2. **The Vallée de la Marne:**

This sub-region is located on the riverbanks of the Marne and its soils are more variable than in other Champagne sub-regions. It contains only two Grands Cru villages: Ay and Tours-sur-Marne. Both of these are Pinot Noir strongholds. In the rest of the Valley however, Pinot Meunier is the main grape variety.

3. **The Côte des Blancs:**

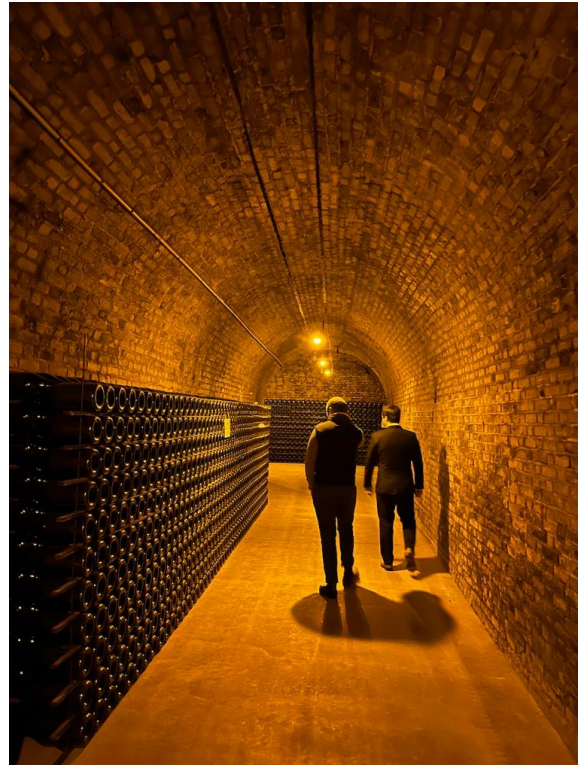
This sub-region owes its name to the color of the grapes that are planted there: 95% Chardonnay. Champagnes produced in this area are often 100% Chardonnay bottlings (*Blanc de Blancs*) and it is the source of Chardonnay for many vintage Champagnes and prestige cuvées from the large Houses. Only four villages are located on the actual Côtes des Blancs slope, namely Avize, Cramant (not to be confused with Crémant!), Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Oger. These are also the most prestigious ones.

4. **The Côte de Sézanne:**

A southern extension of the Côte des Blancs but counts as an own region.

5. **The Côte de Bar:**

While the above areas are all around Reims/Epernay, this region is 150km south, in the Aube department, near Chablis. The soil is also different, Kimmeridgian marl and not chalk. This typically makes for richer Champagne, but no less interesting. Pinot Noir is the predominant grape grown here although small amounts of Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier can be found as well.



## The grapes and the art of blending

To the surprise of most consumers, two thirds of all grapes planted in Champagne are red. White wine is then made out of these red grapes by pressing and quickly separating the must from the skins before the color of the skin can infuse into the must. Hence, you can make white wine from red grapes but not the other way round. The three principal grapes planted in Champagne are 36% Pinot Noir (a red grape), 31% Pinot Meunier (a red grape), and 30% Chardonnay (a white grape). Historically, there are four other varieties permitted but they make less than 3% of all plantings. These are Pinot Blanc, Fromenteau (an ancestor to Pinot Gris), Arbane, and Petit Meslier. They are called “Les cépages oubliés” (the forgotten grape varieties)<sup>2</sup>. The soil of Champagne is mostly limestone and chalk which is ideal for the three main grape varieties.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2022 the INAO approved on an experiential basis (<10%) the artificially crossed, fungus resistant “Voltis” variety. Whether it will also taste well or just help mass producers to use less pesticides remains to be seen. See the PIWI International website ([Link](#)) for further information about this grape.

Unlike still wine - often made from one grape in one vineyard in one vintage - Champagne is first and foremost about the art of handling and blending grapes. It's a wine predominantly made in the cellar not the vineyard (I know it is not a nice thing to say, but it is the truth when you look beyond the marketing of the [CIVC](#)). Boutique Growers are currently changing this; we'll come to that later.

The most common type of Champagne is the Non-Vintage (NV) Brut blend where the sum of grapes/vineyards/vintages should be better than the parts alone. Each grape brings something different to the blend:

- **Pinot Noir** adds backbone, body and heft, producing wines with distinctive aromas of red berries and solid structure.
- **Pinot Meunier** (or Meunier in short) adds roundness and fruitiness to the blend, producing supple wines that tend to age more quickly than the other two varieties. Therefore, it is most useful to make Champagnes ready for near-term drinking.
- **Chardonnay** the only white grape of the Champagne trinity contributes elegance, acidity and lively citrus flavors to the blend, allowing it to age with grace and finesse.

**Try Pinot and Chardonnay dominated cuvées  
to see where your preference lies**

## How it is technically made

All sparkling wines like Champagne, Crémant (Champagne style sparkling wine from other parts of France), Prosecco (sparkling wine from Veneto/Italy), Franciacorta (Champagne style sparkling wine from the Lombardy/Italy), Cava (Champagne style sparkling wine from Spain), Sekt (sparkling wine from Germany) are made from still wine (**vins clairs**), i.e., you make a normal white wine first and then you make sparkling wine out of it through a **second fermentation**<sup>3</sup>. The second fermentation can either be made in a pressure tank (**Charmat method** aka Prosecco method), or in a closed bottle (**méthode traditionnelle**, aka Champagne method). In both cases you add sugar and yeast to the finished white wine and the second fermentation will kick in. Fermentation creates CO<sub>2</sub>; hence the bubbles form and stay it in a closed vessel. Prosecco is the most famous sparkling wine made with the tank method. While this is much more scalable and cost efficient, it will not create the complex,



yeasty, biscuit notes that bottle fermented sparkling wines as Champagne have. The additional aromas and texture of the later come from the dead yeasts (**lees**) that settle as a depot on the bottom of the bottle. As Champagne is laid to rest for several years, the yeasty aromas slowly diffuse into it (**autolysis**) and create an aromatic complexity that a tank method wine cannot achieve. After the 3-10+ years in bottle (minimum 15 months for NV and 3 years for vintage), the yeast needs to be removed, otherwise Champagne would be a cloudy beverage. This is done with riddling, a process where you put the bottle upside down and slowly shake the yeast depot towards the cap, by hand or machine. Once it is all there,

<sup>3</sup> See also [Wine Folly](#)

you freeze that part of the bottle and open the cap. The pressure will eject the cap and the frozen yeast depot. This is called **dégorgement**. After the disgorgement, the bottle is topped up with a little sugar, poetically called **dosage**, to balance the entire beverage and closed with a cork.

As a general rule you can say, the better-quality Champagne you have, the less dosage you need.

- **“Brut”** is the most frequent dosage level of non-sweet Champagne and allows up to 12g of sugar per liter (anything above Brut, Dry/Sec/Doux, is of less interest and not covered here). Today, Brut is most often below 10g in quality products.
- You can label your Champagne **“Extra Brut”** if you have 6g or less, and **“Brut Nature”** or **“Zero dosage”** if you did not add any sugar although up to 3g is still allowed. Zero dosage may sound like the holy grail, but it does come with one disadvantage. The added sugar not only balances the acidity but it also reacts aromatically with the infused amino acids from the lees (**Maillard reaction**), amplifying the much-wanted biscuit notes<sup>4</sup>. That is why, most high-end Champagne today are Extra Brut and not Brut Nature. Finally, it is important to note that if a wine has less than ca. 25g of residual sugar, it still tastes non-sweet. So adding 5-10g does not make Champagne or Prosecco sweet in the literal sense, but more balanced, because the still wine that is used to produce it, is so acidic. If you ever have a chance to taste vins clairs at a Champagne house, you will know what I mean.



## The quality ladder and styles

- **NV - NON-VINTAGE (entry level):**  
The most common type of Champagne is the non-vintage Brut, which is a blend of vintages, grape varieties, vineyards and corresponds to 85% of all Champagne made. The way this is done is to mix the wine from the new vintage with older still wines that are in stock in large steel tanks. The range is between 10-40% of reserve wines. As a general rule, more is better than less, because this improves balance and complexity. It will also help to make the Champagne more drinkable on release as the reserve wines are already aged. Usually, reserve wines are carefully separated by vintage and vineyard so that they can be used as individual ingredients optimizing the blend. Another way to do it, increasingly popular as a limited speciality, is to create a

<sup>4</sup> See also [Wine Scholar Guild](#)

perpetual reserve, like a Sherry Solera where all old wines are mixed into one big blend. No matter what, since only the bottom quality grapes of a large producer go into the entry level NV blend, they have little appeal to serious drinkers and buying a Crémant will give you the same pleasure at a third of the price.

- **NON-VINTAGE (high-end level):**

This may come as a surprise, but for some producers, their NV and not the vintage cuvée, is the top offering. Krug Grande Cuvée NV is the most famous example of this, a blend of 120 different wines from different vintages and vineyards. Case in point, Krug only produced a tiny quantity of 2008 vintage brut and did not even produce a 2012 at all despite these two being the best recent vintages because they need these top vintages as blending reserves for their Grand Cuvée. Other examples are Laurent-Perrier's Grand Siècle NV, Clouet's 1911 NV and Egly-Ouriet's Blanc de Noirs Les Crayères NV. The latter is often considered to be the best Pinot Noir Champagne. To help consumers with the drinking sequence of an NV bottle, some producers have started to put serial numbers onto their high-end NV



Francis Egly und Christian Raubach

offerings. Krug Grand Cuvée 170 for example stands for vintage 2014, 169 for 2013, etc. If there is no serial number, then a disgorgement date on the back label can help to identify the production year of the NV, but that is trickier because you'll need to know the time spent on lees to figure out the base vintage.

- **VINTAGE:**

A Champagne made from grapes of one single vintage. This is produced when the vintage is of good quality and no blending in of other years is needed for a good result. The vintage Brut, is typically placed ahead of the NV Brut in a Champagne House because the better grapes go into the vintage brut, the rest into the NV. So, the driver of the quality here is not really the vintage, but more so the grape selection. 1996, 2002, 2008 and 2012 are the best recent vintages. 2000, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2011 and 2017 the more difficult ones.

- **PRESTIGE CUVÉE:**

Ahead of the Vintage Brut lies another category, the so-called Prestige Cuvée or Tête de Cuvée. This Champagne usually comprises of the very best grape material that a house has at its disposal. They can vary in style and type, some are vintage some are non-vintage, some are blends, some are Blanc de Blancs etc. It just depends on what the Champagne house wants to do. Examples of well-known Prestige Cuvées are Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon, Louis Roederer Cristal and Perrier-Jouet Belle Epoque.

- **SINGLE VINEYARD CUVÉE:**

An outlier in Champagne, but the norm in Burgundy are cuvées that only come from one vineyard site. Philipponnat's Clos des Goisses is the most famous example for this. It is also the Tête de Cuvée of Philipponnat. Other producers have moved into this space and carved out plots for separate bottlings. Rarity equals luxury, and the priciest single vineyard Champagnes are often



bought for their luxury appeal rather than for their gastronomic quality. Caveat emptor - not all expensive single vineyard cuvées are the houses best Champagne.

- **BLANC DE BLANCS:**

This French term refers to Champagnes made exclusively from white, in essence, Chardonnay grapes. They (or any blend where Chardonnay is dominant) are generally lighter-bodied with a racy acidity. When young they can feel a bit lean and mean, but they age well and can bring out the brioche notes in a finesse superior to Pinot Noir. Taittinger's Comtes de Champagne, Charles Heidsieck's Blanc de Millénaires and the horrifically expensive Salon and Krug Clos du Mesnil are some examples here.

- **BLANC DE NOIRS:**

This refers to a white Champagne made exclusively from black grapes, which in Champagne are Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. These wines are fuller-bodied with a richer mouthfeel, wonderful with food and usually drink well earlier on than Chardonnay bottlings. Selsosse Sous le Mont, Bollinger Vieilles Vignes Francaises, Egly-Ouriet Les Crayères, Ulysse Collin Les Maillons are leading Blanc de Noirs.

Note: Philipponnat Glos des Goisses, Pol Roger Winston Churchill, Bollinger Grande Année are famous examples where Pinot Noir dominates the blend, while not being 100% Blanc de Noirs.

- **ROSÉ:**

Refers to pink Champagne that gets its color in one of two ways: (1) **bleeding** (saignée) of the must or (2) **blending** still red and white wine before the bottle fermentation. The saignée method gets its color by macerating the juice with the red grape skins for a while. This method, which is also used to produce normal rosé wine, produces a richer Champagne with more body and tannins. The blending method (which is typically not allowed to make rosé wines elsewhere) is counterintuitively the most frequent method in Champagne. It gives the winemaker more control over the process but both methods can produce good results. Cristal Rosé and Belle Epoque Rosé are two famous specimens.



Christian Raubach

**The best Champagne are made to drink while sitting, not standing.**



A selection of highly recommendable Champagne Rosé

©J.F. Guard

## Styles in general

The above-mentioned categories are also officially used terms. To understand what is on the shelf it is equally important to understand the deliberate styles that producers are trying to create. As mentioned, Champagne is predominately made in the cellar not the vineyard. The parameters that a producer can play with are many: Grape variety mix (covered above), how much reserve wine he adds (covered above), adding more or less dosage (covered above), fermenting and aging the still wine in oak vs. steel tank and to expose the wine to oxidation (covered below), creating a lighter, more aperitif style of wine vs. picking riper grapes for example from lower yields to make a richer, food friendly Champagne (covered below). All these parameters are at the producer's disposal and are in use today.

- **Oxidative vs. reductive style.**

This is not an official category of Champagne but a style that one needs to understand. Seloisse has popularized oxidative Champagne. It is the complete opposite of the traditional, reductive house style Champagne. The oxidative style introduces a controlled amount of oxygen at various stages of vinification, typically through fermenting and aging the base wine in oak barrels (or other air-permeable vessels). The result is a Champagne that has subtle oxidative notes like bruised apples or in extreme cases Sherry notes. It has its enthusiastic followers, but is not something everyone likes. It took me a while to get used to as well but it can be very complex and intriguing. The oxidative style is mostly found in Grower Champagne. Try it out.

- **Vinous vs. lighter style.**

Again, not an official category but another one to understand. Typical Champagne is cropped at up to 10+t/ha and therefore the base wine is rather thin. Through sophisticated wine making the large houses create a beverage that does not feel diluted or too acidic, however it is almost always on the light side. Many Growers are making Champagne from lower yield white wines, through viticulture akin to still white wine making. These Champagne have much more density and texture, they feel vinous and are not really for the aperitif but go well with food. You drink them while sitting, not standing. Of course, the more Pinot and dosage you add, the more vinous a Champagne gets but this style is transcending the variety, even some low-dosage Grower Blanc de Blanc I had were very vinous. Keep this in mind when tasting through Grower Champagne.

**Explore Champagne styles across price levels to find your sweet spot.  
You will be surprised how diverse this beverage is.**

## Aging, decanting and serving Champagne

A final word on cellaring, opening and serving Champagne. Sounds trivial, but often gets messed up.

- **Cellaring:**

To the surprise of many, Champagne ages very well. Bubbles get finer, aromas more complex. I find 15-25 years after production to be an ideal drinking window for top cuvées, similar to top red wines.

- **Opening:**

Sommeliers open Champagne in an elaborate way by holding the cork while turning the bottle. I do not recommend that. Champagne bottles are often wet from condensation or ice bucket

water. The chance of dropping the bottle is just too high. If you don't believe me, google "Champagne open fail" on Youtube. The most sensible method is to put the Champagne on the table like a normal wine bottle and remove the foil but not the wire cage (**muselet**). If you remove the muselet, the cork may fly off by itself. After removing the foil, grip the cork and the muselet together, loosen the wire and slowly open the bottle. You can control the loudness of the pop by how much you loosen the grip on the last turn and thus let the cork and muselet together pop into your palm. Unlike in a restaurant, at home a little pop is welcomed. Let it pop, let the joy begin! Just make sure the Champagne is cold and has not been moved briskly, otherwise it will splash and create a mess.

- **Decanting:**

Yes, you heard right, decanting! High end Champagne, like high end white Burgundy, should always have an expressive nose. If not, decant. Unlike young red wine that may stay closed even in a decanter, a white wine usually opens up significantly after a 30 minutes decant. With Champagne all you need to do is to pour the Champagne slowly into a tilted, rinsed carafe instead of a wide-bodied decanter to avoid the loss of bubbles, just like pouring a beer.

- **Drinking:**

Finally, the most frequent mistake: Never drink quality Champagne out of a flute! It is the worst sin. There are no aromas detectable with a flute since it is too narrow. If you cannot detect any aroma, why bother spending money? Always use a white wine or tulip shaped glass instead.

**Always drink Champagne from a white wine glass,  
decant for 30 minutes if aromatically closed.**



## Must have Champagne

To conclude this report, I wanted to share Champagnes in different price categories that I particularly liked. I tasted them during wine dinners, tasting events and Domaine visits. Most of them multiple times from different vintages. The selection below should give you a good idea of what to expect from each Grower/House cuvée.

### Prestige Cuvées from established Houses

#### Krug, Grand Cuvée 165

Krug is considered the most prestigious Champagne brand, due to its quality and smart decision to only produce prestige cuvées, similar to DRC or Bordeaux First growth. That has tremendously helped its brand. Krug's Grand Cuvée 165/2009 confirms this. A Champagne that pleases beginners and aficionados alike. The well-judged acid balance, the orchard fruit, the breadly autolysis notes, its lush palate and fine acidity are always a pleasure. The GC165 is in a great spot to drink now. Wonderful. All Grand Cuvées that I had in the past showed consistently well and on release the price is reasonable and they are not difficult to find. A clear buy. **96-97/100**.

#### Philipponnat, 2002 Clos des Goisses

Contender for the best Champagne I recently had. The famous Clos delivered. This was stunning, combining floral elements with minerality, creamy, yet fresh palate and very long aromatic finish. Tertiary notes without being oxidative. A Wow Champagne. **98/100**.

#### Pol Roger, 2004 Winston Churchill

Excellent showing, a rich Champagne with a famous background how this Cuvée came about - you are drinking history. Ripe aromas of quince, baked apple, oak spices and some citrus elements. Generous palate, but with good freshness on the dry finish. One of my favorite Pinot led Champagne. Very popular at the table. **96+/100**.

#### Bollinger, 1996 R.D.

Opening this we could easily see that you are in big gun Pinot territory with ca. 20 years of age attached to it. Nose of bruised apples, marzipan, nuts and bakery spices. Earthy elements as well. Serious wines for the table, not the aperitif. **96/100**.

#### Piper-Heidsieck, 2002 Rare

This is a Cuvée that always delivers, despite having the most vulgar bottle design. A hedonistic style, think Dom Perignon on steroids. Very expressive in the nose, almost indecently so. In the typical house style with spades of brioche/dosage/lemon curd aromas. The balance is impeccable and it finishes dry enough. I understand why this collected so many awards. If you want to showcase one Champagne that exemplifies the high-end house style, where confection/wine making is more important than viticulture, this is your bottle. Usually attractively priced on release. **98/100**.





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### **Moët&Chandon, 2008 Dom Pérignon**

A seriously good Dom. We decanted this for 30 minutes and it sprung to life. Aromas dominated by white flowers, citrus and brioche, almost felt like a Blanc de Blanc, so young and fresh this was. It added more and more complexity as it sat in the glass. A great vintage for Dom. Amazing how they can keep the quality up while producing ca 8 million bottles. **96-97/100.**

### **Louis Roederer, 2008 Cristal**

During a blind tasting dinner. Discrete nose, hinting at complexity after swirling, oak, flowers, mineral, herbs, closed still. Elegant palate, precise, lightly bitter finish feels very young still. Needs more charm and mid palate presence for a top score. Wait. **94-96/100.**

### **Deutz, 2007 William Deutz**

Owned by Roederer and much more attractively priced with comparable quality. This house is one of the best kept secrets if you like Pinot led Champagne. Their single vineyard Blanc de Noirs "Meurtet/Côte Glaciers" are also top and not expensive. The 2007 Cuvée William Deutz is in an excellent place now. Mature, fine bubbles with brioche, citrus oil, very aromatic. **96/100.**

### **Gosset, 2002 Celebris**

From magnum, during a large dinner. This Cuvée stunned a lot of people who usually drink cheap Champagne only. Nose of bakery, yeast, quite floral but restraint and not too sweet. Very nice complexity, good tertiary aromas also emerge on the finish. Fine perlage and mouth feel. In great form, ready now. **96/100.** Good QPR.

### **Perrier-Jouët, 2014 Belle-Epoque**

I have always been a fan of this cuvée, not just because it has the most beautiful bottle design in Champagne. It does not get the high notes from critics, but at the table it always delivers. Made in a crowd-pleasing style with overt brioche, citrus elements and white flowers. Elegant and fresh, so it pleases a sophisticated palate as well. Excellent showing of the racy 2014 vintage. Also usually reasonably priced on release. **96/100.**



### **Charles Heidsieck, 2004 Blanc de Millenaire**

Probably my favorite Blanc de Blanc from any house, a blend of Avize, Cramant, Oger, Mesnil-sur-Oger and Vertus. Very classic nose with ripe lemon, green apples and some yeasty aromas in the background, chiseled and complex, opened up nicely in the glass. The palate is crispy with a sappy finish. Dosage feels lower than in the Taittinger Comte de Champagne for example but I read it is 9g. Certainly the sugar does not show itself as sweet. Awesome. **97/100**.

### **Taittinger, 2012 Comte de Champagne**

Youthful nose with predominantly lemon peel aromas and a touch of candied sugar. Autolytic and tertiary notes still very much in the background still, quite a bit of dosage at the finish, hope this will become less prominent. Generous palate like all 2012s with the freshness of a Blanc de Blanc. The 2008 drinks great today but I would definitely cellar this 2012 for at least another 5-8 years and it will likely add a point from here. It is fair to say that this is the most famous Blanc de Blanc cuvée in the world and on release a no brainer to buy. **95/100**.

### **Salon, 1997 Salon**

Salon Blanc de Blanc is the prestige Cuvée of Champagne house Delamotte. If the vintage is not called, the grapes of Salon go into the Delamotte Blanc de Blanc.

Beautiful yet subtle nose of citrus and brioche. This is really crisp and clean, very fine and delicate, almost too delicate. You could see why this was probably not interesting, even austere in its youth. However, now with age we have a very fine and subtle Blanc de Blanc Champagne for the connoisseur. Like Seloisse, it has become a show-off brand, especially in Asia, and its price is now at a place where it is unattractive to buy from an economic perspective. **96+/100**.

### **Dom Ruinart, 2002 Blanc de Blanc**

Dom Ruinart are the Prestige bottlings of Champagne house Ruinart. Owned by LVMH. Wonderfully complex nose of lemon rind with brioche. Very subtle and precise. On the palate the wine is a ballerina with very fine perlage and a long finish. A really grand Blanc de Blanc. **96/100**.

## **Attractively priced and easy to find Cuvées from established houses**

### **Pol Roger, 2013 Vintage Brut**

Half the price of Winston Churchill, but not far away in quality. The recently released 2012 and 2013 were a very successful pair, with the 2013 being racier and the 2012 plusher. Next to bakery and marked red apple aromas there is a strong herbal streak with verbena and thyme. Really seductive, almost indecently so due to a generous 8g dosage that is buffering the green elements. Both scored **95/100**. A Champagne to buy on release as a reliable cellar defender.

### **Taittinger, NV Prelude**

A recent creation of Taittinger and a candidate for the most luscious and mouth-watering Champagne. The nose is explosively aromatic with apple pie, yeasty and citrus oil aromas. Full bodied palate, generous dosage but with enough freshness to make it dry enough. Definitely not for the no-dosage purists, but so charming and hard to dislike. Great QPR too. **95/100**.

### **Piper-Heidsieck, 2012 Vintage Brut**

Very good Champagne in the glass here. This is stylistically close to the 2012 Dom Perignon and Belle Epoque that I tasted on release but at a very different price level. Like a mini Rare. Fragrant, succulent,



lots of brioche, citrus notes, confectioned the growers may say, but hey, if it is that charming, what's not to like. The finish has some lovely bitterness to it. **94+/100.**

### **Jacquesson, NV Cuvee 740**

The 700 series from this producer is always delivered at an attractive price. Recently acquired by Artemis (the [group](#) founded 1992 by François Pinault who also owns Chateau Latour, Clos de Tart, Domaine d'Eugénie, Eisele Vineyards, among other). It is an NV champagne but like Krug GC, the serial number leads you to the vintage. 740 stands for 2012. Beautiful spicy nose with brioche and bruised apples, good density. A food Champagne, more in the restraint, grower style than the instantaneous house offerings. **95/100.**

### **Drappier ([Link](#)), 2008 Grand Sendrée**

From the Côte de Bar. A prestige Cuvée of a house with a remarkably reasonable price. Beautiful nose of bruised apples, spices, clearly Pinot led, good aromatic persistence, showing already some age. **95/100.**

## **Grower Champagne**

### **The Godfathers**

#### **Jacques Selosse, NV Ambonnay au Bout du Clos**

Selosse is ground zero of the Grower movement and now revered like a rock star. It often takes a moment to get used to the Selosse Champagnes as they are lightly oxidative. Quality is very good but the price gap now too large vs. the Growers that follow in his footsteps. TN: Wow, really excellent and complex Pinot nose with an oxidative steak yet fresh on the palate. Bruised apples, earthy scents, savory, mouth filling palate. Very grand and textbook Selosse style. **96-97/100.**

#### **Egly-Ouriet, NV Les Crayères Blanc de Noirs**

The king of Pinot Noir Champagne whose insider only status was abruptly terminated with two 100-point scores from William Kelley, Wine Advocate.

This Champagne has a light orange hue color, showing its Pinot pedigree. Explosive nose of flowers, strawberries, bakery, vanilla. A dream Champagne in every aspect showing age but not as oxidative as Selosse. Alas, also this got very expensive. **98+/100.**



Tasting Selosse's Champagne

## **Well established**

#### **Agrapart, 2012 Avizoise**

A leading Blanc de Blanc grower, purist style, buy this instead of Salon. A seriously good Blanc de Blanc, the Avizoise marries the fresh lemon fruit style of a Blanc de Blanc with the generosity of the 2012 vintage. Stays crispy and clean on the palate, yet never thin. Long finish with beautiful bakery notes. **97/100.**

## Larmandier-Bernier, 2012 Vieilles Vignes de Levant

Another well-known Blanc de Blanc grower. A really wonderful nose. Opened up quickly in the glass and showed complex aromas of citrus, flowers and cinnamon apples. Lots of material and phenolics on the palate, succulent yet appropriately dry on the finish. I can see why William Kelley, Wine Advocate, was praising this. Young. **96+/100**.



## Diebolt-Vallois ([Link](#)), 2002 Fleur de Passion

From magnum. An insider name in the Côte des Blancs is this well-run family estate. Made in oak barrels, the Fleur de Passion has a spectacular nose with buttery elements, caramel, intermixed with lots of white flowers, citrus, biscuit. Really stunning, a very grand Blanc de Blanc. **96/100**.

## Ulysse Collin, 2018 Blanc de Noirs les Maillons

Based in Aube, another apprentice of Selosse, under the radar until recently but now commands hair raising prices. A very pure, delicate Blanc de Noir, different to Egly's richness. Fresh, intensely floral nose, some spices, quince. Refined palate with subtle perlage. Very grand. **97/100**.

## Roses de Jeanne ([Link](#)) / Cédric Bouchard, 2016 Blanc de Noirs la Presle

Also based in Aube. Tasted blind. Easily to be identified as a grower style. Everything is very precise and compact, lots of pear aromas, some red fruit as well, still very foamy, needed a decant to get rid of the excess youthful mousse. The palate is very delineated, generous mouth fill at the same time, unlike some purist Grower offerings who can be too lean. **95/100**.

## Henri Giraud ([Link](#)), MV16 Ay Fût de Chêne

A Blanc de Noir specialist. Youthful and very bubbly. Intense aromas of raspberries, bakery spices, vanilla and some earthy element, some herbs as well. Lots of oak comes into play with this producer, often needs time to integrate. Best to lay down for a good while after release. **94/100**.



Raphaël Bérèche runs the winery with his brother Vincent

### **Bérèche** ([Link](#)), **NV Brut Réserve**

The super star brothers from the Montagne de Reims have lots of special and unfortunately increasingly expensive cuvées. To me their NV Brut Reserve is a contender for the best base level Champagne of any estate. Complex nose of red flowers, spices, lemon elements. You can feed the Pinot richness. Generous palate, dry finish. An NV benchmark! **94+/100**.

### **Pierre Peters** ([Link](#)), **2015 Les Chétillons**

A Blanc de Blanc specialist. Beautiful cooked apple and cinnamon on the nose, very much in the lightly oxidative grower style. Sophisticated, delicate palate. Young but surprisingly approachable. **95/100**.

### **Vilmart** ([Link](#)), **2017 Grand Cellier d'Or Premier Cru**

A well-known Blanc de Blanc family-owned estate in the Montagne de Reims. A step-up from the Grand Cellier NV. More bitter elements, more spice, richer, riper, fine bubbles, creme brulée, pine apple and dried fruit on the finish. Very good and reasonably priced. **95/100**.



### **André Clouet** ([Link](#)), **2006 Clos Bouzy**

Single vineyard cuvée, in magnum only. A wow Champagne, this Blanc de Noir had an impressive palate, dense, fresh, powerful. Complex and expressive Pinot nose with red berries, spices. Very grand from start to finish. Beautiful label as well. **96/100**.



## Up and coming

### **Dhondt-Grellet, 2017 Les Nogers**

A name that is raising fast and so do its prices, based in the Côte des Blancs. From magnum. This beautiful Champagne had an expressive nose with notes of pear, some red apples, bakery spices. Caressing and succulent, yet dry. Loved it. **95/100.**

### **Chartogne-Taillet ([Link](#)), 2016 Les Barres**

Based in Merfy on the other side of the Montagnes de Reims, is also one of the so-called Seloisse apprentices. A 100% Meunier Champagne, expressive and captivatingly fruity nose with bruised apples, sweet spices. Precise palate with chalky finish, with Chenin Blanc aromas playing into the mix. A really good, unique Grower Champagne. **96/100.**

### **Frédéric Savart, NV L'Accomplie**

A sommelier favorite, steadily rising in fame, based in Montage de Reims. Very fragrant nose, white flowers intermixed with red fruit and spices, generous palate. Still a base cuvée, but a step up from the Ouverture and a really awesome for the price. **94/100.**

## Suenen ([Link](#)), 2012 Blanc de Blanc Grand Cru

Based in Cramant this name is getting more and more accolades for its Blanc de Blanc. Great citrus nose right off the bat with lovely brioche elements. Feels generous and succulent on the palate despite being extra-brut. A really well-made Blanc de Blanc. **94+/100**.

## La Closerie / Jérôme Prévost ([Link](#)), NV les Béguins

This 100% Meunier Champagne is also raising to stardom quickly. Dense and phenolic, not for the beginner, oak, earthy elements, not oxidative but with good tertiary notes. **95/100**.

## Françoise Bedel ([Link](#)), NV Entre Ciel et Terre

Based in the Vallée de Marne, known for its terrific Meunier Champagne at reasonable prices. Lovely oxidative notes, nutty with a touch of Sherry, Selse style. Complex with raspberry and grapefruit and also some pink flowers. Very nice length on the finish. **94/100**.

## Huré Frères ([Link](#)), NV Mémoire

Based in the Montage de Reims, crafting powerful Pinot based Champagnes. The Mémoire uses a Solera reserve starting from 1982. I liked this Champagne for its racy, dry character, leads with apple cider aromas oak and cinnamon spice, lots of power on the palate, clearly in Pinot land here. Must go with food. **94+/100**.

## Dehours & Fils ([Link](#)), NV La Croix Joly Réserve Perpétuelle

Based in the Vallée de Marne, this is another good grower working with Meunier and applying a Selse like style. A strikingly aromatic Champagne, right after opening typical Meunier profile with lots of bruised apples, cinnamon spice, nutty, aged but not too aggressively oxidative. Very distinctive, showing the age of the reserve perpetual. Savory, best with food. **95/100**.

## Tarlant ([Link](#)), 2004 La Vigne d'Or

Also based in the Vallée de Marne. 100% Meunier. After some air, expressive nose with bruised apples and sweet spices. The Meunier brings fruitiness to the aged notes. Complex finish. **95/100**.



[La carte des arômes](#) (the aroma map)

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## Cooperatives

Cooperatives are associated more with mass market offerings than gastronomic Champagne and thus often carry a negative brand premium. The below cuvées are well worth seeking out.

### Mailly ([Link](#)), NV Blanc de Noirs

This Cooperatives sits in the Grand Cru village Mailly and exclusively sources its grapes from there. The Blanc de Noirs is a sensational find for this price, everyone at the table agreed. Expressive nose with beautiful citrus, bakery, red fruit elements, and spices, succulent yet adequately mineral on the finish. **94/100**.

### Mailly ([Link](#)), 2012 Echanson

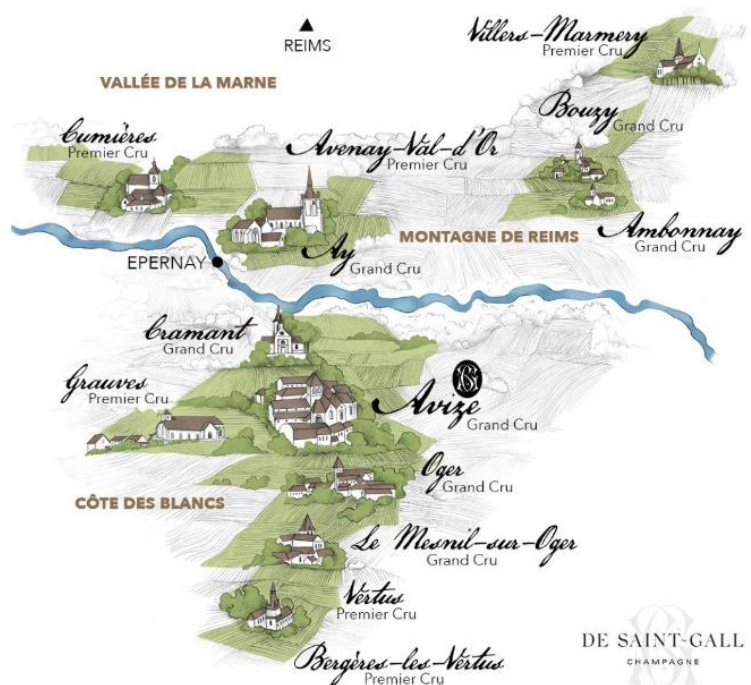
The prestige Cuvée with 75% Pinot Noirs in the blend. Beautiful pinot nose with spices, bruised apples and raspberry notes. Lots of phenolics, chalky finish, low dosage. **95/100**.

### Union de Champagne de Saint Gall ([Link](#)), 2004 Blanc de Blancs

This was smuggled into a flight to pair with Taittinger's Comte de Champagne and it held its own. Very much in the Chardonnay style with citrus oil, generous dosage but good freshness and length. Nothing tough or lean here, well judged. **94/100**.

## Where to buy Grower Champagne:

- **In Champagne:** Cave Du Forum ([Link](#)) in Reims, very large wine shop with an incredible selection of the most sought-after wines in the world (see photo on next page); 520 ([Link](#)) - Champagne and wine Authors in Epernay
- **In Switzerland/Germany:** We recommend to use [Wine-Searcher](#) to find your favourite Champagne.



©Union de Champagne de Saint Gall ([Link](#))

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