

Grower Champagne: The Selosse School and Beyond

Grower Champagne is fast overtaking white Burgundy as a collectible favorite for regular consumption, and has been vastly undervalued in the market, as many people are not yet familiar with all of the producers and their individual *cuvees*.

That has begun to change, as the major critics are now covering these wines with widespread interest.

Distribution is still fragmented though, and restaurant *sommeliers* (who often get the first look) tend to buy-up the available supply for their menu pairings and by-the-glass pours.

We are particularly interested in this category, which offers more quality-for-value and much greater long-term aging predictability than white Burgundy too.

For \$40 - \$80 / bottle, you have an enormous amount of food-friendly wines, with real depth and complexity, that will age and improve for 15+ years - read some of the reviews below, and see what the professionals say.

[We're pleased to offer a large selection of top-rated Champagnes, direct from the producer's cellars and at very sharp prices.](#)

Henri Billiot

“Louis Billiot had a press in Ambonnay in the beginning of the 20th century, pressing grapes for Mumm and Moët & Chandon, but he also bottled a little wine of his own. His grandson Henri was the one responsible for the creation of the estate that lies in the center of the village today: Henri, being the eldest of five siblings, took the family’s holdings in Ambonnay and began producing estate-bottled champagne exclusively from grand cru vines...Billiot’s five hectares of vines are all in Ambonnay, spread over 18 parcels. Even more impressive is that all but one of their parcels are on the mid-slope, in the most favored portion of the vineyard area, expressing the classical character of this famous village. ‘The wines of Ambonnay are very vinous, with a lot of strength,’ says Laetitia Billiot, ‘but they are also very fine, with delicacy and finesse. They stay fresh for a long time.’ Billiot’s wines are packed with plenty of flavor, yet at their best, they combine their depth with a rare elegance and harmony that sets them apart from many of their peers.” – Peter Liem, [Champagne Guide](#)

Henri Billiot Brut Reserve NV

List Price: \$50, Our Price: **\$40**

92 points Burghound: "A wonderfully elegant, complex and pure nose offers up aromas of lemon rind, green apple, white flowers and a hint of cherry. The palate impression displays the same refinement as the nose with its very fine mousse and delicate flavors that still deliver outstanding punch on the balanced and impressively long finish. A Champagne of subtlety and grace that is drinking perfectly now though it could certainly be held longer if desired."

Henri Billiot Brut Rose NV

List Price: \$60, Our Price: **\$45**

92 points View From the Cellar: "The excellent bouquet jumps from the glass in a pure and classy blend of white cherries, tangerine, a touch of cinnamon, wheat toast, gentle smokiness and a complex base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and nascently complex, with a fine core, pinpoint bubbles and lovely length and grip on the poised, focused and zesty finish. This is not as expressive on the palate today as it is aromatically, but all of the constituent components are in place for an exquisite bottle of Brut Rosé with a bit more bottle age, so just tuck this lovely bottle away in a cool corner of the cellar for a couple of years and let time work its magic- it will be well worth the wait!"

Henri Billiot Brut Cuvee Julie NV

List Price: \$95, Our Price: **\$65**

94 points Burghound: "In this particular case, the time in wood has very definitely added depth, not only from the slightly oxidative character but it has contributed mightily to the complexity. However, long-time readers know that I believe that there is no free lunch and in that sense, what has been gained in terms of depth has been lost in terms of freshness and precision. Some will like the trade-off and some will prefer tighter and more classically styled examples. I actually quite like this because it's delicious and it's relatively rare to obtain this much complexity and flat out superb length in a toasty package. That said, I have to underscore that this is not my preferred style even though I can admire it for what it is. In sum, if you enjoy wood-influenced Champagne, this is terrific. By contrast, if you don't, it would be best to look elsewhere."

Henri Billiot Brut Cuvee Laetitia NV

List Price: \$100, Our Price: **\$70**

93 points Burghound: ""This is remarkably fresh for it to have such a large proportion of aged stock in it and while the nose is mature, there are absolutely no oxidative elements in it. In fact, I deliberately revisited this 24 hours after first opening it to see how the nose had evolved and I can report that there was very little discernable evolution. As I say, while fully mature, the mildly yeasty nose displays notes of baked apple, roasted nut and a dried rose petal nuance that also characterizes the rich, full and utterly delicious flavors that are also fresh and vibrant with plenty of energy and finishing punch. Often Champagnes with high percentages of reserves in them lack the same effervescence but that is certainly not the case here. This is a lovely effort that could be drunk now with pleasure or held for years to come."

Henri Billiot Brut Millesime 2009

List Price: \$85, Our Price: **\$60**

92+ points View From the Cellar: "The 2009 H. Billiot Fils "Brut Millésimé" is a bit more than seventy-five percent pinot noir, with the remainder of the cépage made up of chardonnay, with this example spending four and a half years aging sur latte prior to disgorgement. The nose wafts from the glass in a fine mix of apple, peach, warm biscuits, complex soil tones, a bit of smokiness and a nice touch of hazelnut in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a beautiful combination of 2009's ripeness and excellent structural integrity. The wine is rock solid at the core, the mousse is refined, the acids are bright and zesty and there is excellent complexity on the long and well-balanced finish. I was very impressed with this wine a year ago and it is not lost a step in the intervening twelve months! Fine juice."

Nicolas Maillart

"The Maillart family has been growing vines in the western portion of the Montagne de Reims since at least 1753, and has been bottling champagne for five generations. Originally based in the village of Chamery, they have since moved to the neighboring village of Ecueil, and the current estate dates from 1965, when it was created by Michel Maillart. Today the house is in the hands of Michel's son Nicolas, who took over in 2003...Maillart's wines are bold and full of flavor, with an expressive character and harmonious depth. I enjoyed his father's wines in the past, made in a more traditional style, but Nicolas Maillart's wines express more depth and more clarity of fruit, demonstrating a contemporary emphasis on viticulture. Most of the wines are blended from Maillart's three main terroirs of Ecueil, Villers-Allerand and Bouzy, all of which have different soil types, but his two cuvées of pure Ecueil are extremely expressive of the sand and clay soils in the region." – Peter Liem, [Champagne Guide](#)

Nicolas Maillart Brut Platine NV

List Price: \$50, Our Price: **\$40**

92 points Burghound: "A beautifully complex and moderately yeasty nose of primarily floral and citrus aromas that complements well the delicious and equally complex flavors that are crisp without being aggressive and the effervescence is relatively fine on the vibrant and lingering finish. While I wouldn't go so far as to call this a Champagne of finesse, there is a certain delicacy of expression here but in the end, it's the complexity that distinguishes it."

Nicolas Maillart Brut Rose NV

List Price: \$55, Our Price: **\$45**

93 points View From the Cellar: "The current release of the Nicolas Maillart Brut Rosé is the same bottling that I reported on last October, and I strongly urge readers to search out this lovely bottle of Rosé before it disappears from the market. The wine offers up an outstanding bouquet of blood orange, cherries, bread dough, chalky minerality and orange peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core of fruit, very elegant and vibrant bubbles, impeccable focus and balance and great length and grip on the snappy finish. The acids here are zesty, but beautifully ripe and simply buried in the core of the wine, making this young Brut Rosé already a great drink- though it will have no difficulty aging another ten to fifteen years or more. Very impressive!"

Nicolas Maillart Blanc de Blancs Les Chaillots 2004

List Price: \$85, Our Price: **\$70**

93+ points *View From the Cellar*: "The 2004 Nicolas Maillart "Les Chaillots Gillis" Blanc de Blancs is made up entirely of old vines, with no parcels under sixty years of age, and all of the vins clairs for this superb bottling were barrel-fermented. The wine was disgorged in October of 2013, after having spent eight and a half years resting sur latte in the Maillart cellars and was finished off with a dosage of two grams per liter. The bouquet is stunning, jumping from the glass in a very classy blend of pear, almond, brioche, a complex base of soil tones, gentle smokiness, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a very, very discreet whiff of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with an excellent core of fruit, elegant, pinpoint bubbles, bright acids and a very, very long, mineral-driven finish. This is still a puppy and will be even better with a few more years' worth of bottle age, but it is going to be awfully hard to resist right now, as it is drinking with great class and style."

Nicolas Maillart Blanc de Noirs Les Francs de Pieds 2005

List Price: \$140, Our Price: **\$95**

92 points *Vinous*: "The 2005 Extra Brut Blanc de Noirs Premier Cru Les Francs de Pied is an intriguing wine made from ungrafted, pre-phyloxera vines, also in Ecueil. This gorgeous, boisterous Champagne emerges with waves of sweet Pinot fruit layered into elements of chalky minerality, flowers and baking spices. The wine continues to emerge nicely in the glass, but it remains somewhat taut and in need of further time on the cork. An intense, dry finish typical of the extra brut style rounds out this engaging, multi-dimensional Champagne. This is a lovely effort."

Ployez-Jacquemart

"This small, family-owned Champagne house was created in 1930 by Marcel Ployez and his wife, Yvonne Jacquemart. Upon Marcel's death in 1957, Yvonne ran the house for the next ten years, and was succeeded by her son Gérard. Today Gérard Ployez's daughter, Laurence, is in charge of the winemaking. The house owns roughly two hectares of vines—one hectare of meunier in Ludes, behind the winery, and another hectare of pinot noir in Mailly—and the rest of their grapes are purchased exclusively from grand cru and premier cru villages...The vintage wines are aged for a minimum of six years in Ployez-Jacquemart's deep, chalky cellars: unusually, they spend the first couple of years on their sides, sur latte, and then are stored upside-down, sur pointe, for a minimum of four years. At their best, Ployez-Jacquemart's champagnes blend a richness and breadth of flavor with a quiet, filigreed elegance."

– Peter Liem, [Champagne Guide](#)

Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs 2005

List Price: \$80, Our Price: **\$65**

93+ points View From the Cellar: *"The 2005 Ployez-Jacquemart Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut is aging very gracefully and starting to really blossom on the palate with a bit more bottle age. This wine spent six years on its fine lees, so it was probably disgorged in the latter half of 2012 and is now really coming into its own on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is starting to show some secondary layers of complexity in its blend of apple, pear, almond paste, chalky minerality, a bit of caraway seed, plenty of smokiness and a discreet touch of oak (from the vins clairs in the cuvée that were barrel-fermented). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still beautifully structured, with a fine chassis of acidity, impeccable focus and grip, very refined mousse, a rock solid core and outstanding length and grip on the complex finish. This is drinking very well, but is clearly built to age and will be even better with a bit more time in the cellar. A very high class bottle of bubbly."*

Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut 2005

List Price: \$80, Our Price: **\$65**

93+ points View From the Cellar: *"The 2005 Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Brut is comprised of a blend of half chardonnay and half pinot noir and pinot meunier (the breakdown of the black grapes was not available) and the wine spent at least six years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The wine offers up a fine bouquet of apple, gentle tangerine, beautifully complex soil tones, a dollop of brioche and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still quite youthful, with an excellent core of fruit, brisk acids, great*

focus and grip, refined, pinpoint bubbles and lovely bounce and nascent complexity on the very long minerally finish. This is outstanding juice, but like so many 2005 vintage-dated bottlings, it is still a bit on the young side for primetime drinking and I would tuck it away for at least a couple more years before starting to drink it. It will be stellar at its apogee."

Ployez-Jacquemart Brut Liesse d'Harbonville 1999

List Price: \$160, Our Price: **\$115**

95 points View From the Cellar: "The 1999 Ployez-Jacquemart "Liesse d'Harbonville" is its customary blend of seventy percent chardonnay and thirty percent pinot noir, with all of the vins clairs barrel-fermented and aged for six months in the cellars in two and three year-old barrels. The wine does not undergo malolactic fermentation and is aged for more than twelve years on the lees prior to disgorgement. The 1999 bottling offers up a deep and very classy nose of pear, delicious apple, buttery overtones from the oak, brioche, crème patissière, complex minerality, a bit of hazelnut and a topnote of gentle smokiness. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and very racy (from its non-malo personality), with a great core of fruit, broad shoulders (from the '99 vintage's ripeness), very refined mousse and stunning complexity on the very long, poised and perfectly balanced finish. The ripeness of 1999 is mostly felt here in terms of the breadth of the attack and the rock solid nature of the wine in the mid-palate, but I also get the sense that this fine vintage of Liesse d'Harbonville will mature on a faster track than wines such as the 1995 or 1996, and will probably be at its apogee within the next three or four years. It is a stellar example of the '99 vintage."

Ployez-Jacquemart Brut Liesse d'Harbonville 2000

List Price: \$130, Our Price: **\$110**

94 points View From the Cellar: "The 2000 vintage of Ployez-Jacquemart's "Liesse d'Harbonville" Tête de Cuvée is a superb example of this more forward vintage. As readers may recall, the vins clairs for this cuvée are all barrel-fermented, do not undergo malo and the wine is aged sur latte for a minimum of ten years prior to disgorgement. The bouquet offers up a gorgeous, maturing mix of apple, a touch of passion fruit, plenty of smokiness, a complex base of soil, toast and a dollop of orange blossoms in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a fine core, elegant mousse, a fairly wide open structure and lovely bounce and grip on the focused and vibrant finish. This is a superb bottle that is at its apogee today, but clearly will continue on drinking at its peak of maturity for at least another decade."

Rene Geoffroy

"While this prominent grower estate has recently moved to the village of Aÿ, the Geoffroy name is inextricably linked to that of Cumières, where the family has winegrowing roots that date back to the 17th century. Today Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy and his father René farm 14 hectares of vines, 11 of which are in Cumières. A few parcels are located just across the border to the west in the adjacent village of Damery, while the rest is all meunier in the nearby village of Fleury-la-Rivière. Geoffroy's vines average about 20 years of age, and the oldest are from 1926...Geoffroy's wines are bold in flavor and extroverted in personality. They show a generous depth of fruit, reflecting the warm growing conditions in this corner of the Marne Valley, and the Empreinte and Volupté in particular are capable of a remarkable expression of the Cumières terroir. At the same time, the wines are also capable of a fine and complex elegance, and although the wines are released relatively young, it is well worth putting them away in the cellar to allow them to develop their full potential." – Peter Liem, [Champagne Guide](#)

Rene Geoffroy Brut Expression NV

List Price: \$50, Our Price: **\$40**

91 points Wine Advocate: "The NV Brut Expression is a fabulous wine that impresses for its energy and verve. Lime, lemon, jasmine and minerals are some of the notes that emerge from this finely chiseled Champagne. This bottling is 70% 2008, and the energy (and acidity) of the year comes through loud and clear. This is a terrific entry-level non-vintage Champagne. The blend is 70% 2008 (29% Pinot Noir, 25% Meunier and 16% Chardonnay) plus 30% reserve wine that is essentially the prior years' bottling."

Rene Geoffroy Brut Empreinte NV

List Price: \$65, Our Price: **\$45**

92 points Vinous: "The NV Brut Empreinte emerges from the glass with beautifully delineated fruit, great body and terrific overall balance. Sweet red berries, flowers and mint are some of the nuances that are woven into a rich fabric of notable class. The Empreinte shows striking depth and purity. The higher percentage of Pinot seems inherently better suited to vinification in oak than the Chardonnay in this vintage. The Empreinte is 76% Pinot Noir, 14% Chardonnay and 10% Pinot Meunier."

Vazart-Coquart

“Located in an imposing farmhouse on the main road in Chouilly, this well-known estate was created at the end of the 19th century by Camille Vazart. Vazart’s son married a Coquart, resulting in the estate’s current name, and while the family grew grapes in addition to operating the family farm, it wasn’t until 1954 that Jacques Vazart, Camille’s grandson, began to bottle champagne and to focus on wine production. Since 1989, Jacques’s son Jean-Pierre has been working at the estate as well, and as of 2005 he has officially taken over the reins...Vazart’s 11 hectares of vines are all in Chouilly, spread over 30 parcels in every sector of the village except, ironically, Les Partelaines, where the estate is actually located. All but one of the parcels is planted with chardonnay: Vazart has one 40-acre parcel of pinot noir used to make a rare Coteaux Champenois Chouilly rouge. The average age of the estate’s vines is 30 years. Vazart-Coquart champagnes are typical of the Chouilly terroir, showing a round, fragrant ripeness.”

– Peter Liem, [Champagne Guide](#)

Vazart-Coquart Brut Reserve NV

List Price: \$55, Our Price: **\$40**

92 points Burghound: "A cool, airy and elegant array of soft yeast and citrus nuances add breadth to the green apple and white rose scents. There is a lovely sense of energy to the overtly yeasty medium weight flavors that possess excellent complexity on the vibrant, clean and relatively dry finish. I very much like the bold character and while the mouth feel isn't as refined as the nose, overall this is an excellent combination of punch, complexity and muscularity. Otherwise stated, this is a robust blanc de blanc."

Vazart-Coquart Extra Brut NV

List Price: \$50, Our Price: **\$40**

92 points View From the Cellar: "The Extra Brut bottling of Blanc de Blancs from the fine house of Vazart-Coquart was finished off with a dosage of four grams per liter and offers up a classically expressive Vazart bouquet of comice pears, delicious apples, brioche, complex, chalky soil tones, incipient notes of crème patissière and spring flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and complex, with youthfully brisk acids, fine minerality, elegant mousse and very fine length and grip on the focused and very promising finish. This is very well-balanced, but to my palate, still a tad on the young side, and I would be inclined to tuck this away in the cellar for another year or two and really let it come

out from behind its structural elements. But, it will be excellent in the fullness of time, and for low dosage fans, I imagine it is just fine right now."

Vazart-Coquart Blanc de Blancs Special Club 2008

List Price: \$90, Our Price: **\$65**

93+ points View From the Cellar: "It had been about fifteen months since I last tasted the 2008 Special Club bottling from Jean-Pierre Vazart and the wine continues to blossom beautifully. Today the nose is quite open, jumping from the glass in a fine blend of apple, pear, brioche, complex, chalky minerality, smoke, almond and a nice topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and impeccably balanced, with a lovely core of fruit, fine soil inflection, elegant mousse and a very long, refined and still quite zesty finish. The inherent elegance of the 2008 vintage is beautifully reflected in this very classy bottle of Blanc de Blancs. Though it is quite approachable today, I would still give it at least another handful of years in the cellar, as the wine will continue to develop more of its secondary layers of complexity with further bottle age. Very high class juice."