

Vinum

EXTRA



CHAMPAGNER

240 top champagnes for every taste
The best winemakers and brands of 2015
Champagne style school

TEN OF THE BEST CHAMPAGNES

The top of the pile in Champagne is broadening. However, it is spearheaded by wines from proven brands which we have trusted for years: Jacquesson, Gosset, Deutz and Pol Roger. They've now been joined at the top by Charles Heidsieck, whose new owner still has plenty up his sleeve, and two top-level small wineries, Veuve Fourny and de Sousa, which astonished us with a new premium cuvée.



① Champagne Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 1995 20 points | 2016 to 2017

We very rarely award top marks. We have known and been tasting this exceptional wine for several years, and every time thought its decline would have to begin soon. Not in the slightest! An illustration of absolute elegance and perfect ripeness.

② Champagne Gosset Celebris 2002 20 points | 2015 bis 2030

We tasted this wine repeatedly and in various circumstances, but failed to find any errors, only further qualities: this is a resounding success, the perfect combination of wine and sparkle, power and elegance.

③ Champagne Jacquesson Dizy Corne Bautray 2005 19 points | 2016 to 2017

There are very few 2005s which we really like. However, once again Jacquesson has done things rather differently, and given us this stunning wine with its flawless expression of Pinot. For current and budding connoisseurs.

④ Champagne Deutz Amour de Deutz 2006 19 points | 2015 to 2017

Deutz is Amour, Amour is Deutz, and the 2006 vintage particularly suits the incomparably delicate, airy style of this wine. One of the most beautiful, tempting, elegant, transcendent wines on the market.

5 Champagne Deutz

William Deutz 2006

19 points | 2015 to 2018

Amour's counterpart is William: intense, fruity, down to earth, tart, spirited yet incomparably elegant. This magnificent wine is proof that you can appreciate both blond and brunette, finesse and power.

6 Champagne Veuve Fourny

Clos du Faubourg Notre Dame Premier Cru 2005

18.5 points | 2016 to 2018

We only have one criticism to level at the Fourny brothers: they are too small to pass as a "big brand". Their greatness instead lies in their wines, in particular this stunning single-site wine, one of the very best champagnes available.



7 Champagne Jacquesson

Aÿ Vauzelle Terme 2005

18.5 points | 2016 to 2017

The weightier version of the two top single-site wines from this small yet perfectly formed Dizy brand, even more vinous, Burgundian and intense, one of the best sparkling wines from this complicated vintage.

8 Champagne Taittinger

Comtes de Champagne 2006

18.5 points | 2016 to 2018

Style is everything in champagne, and this Comtes is so perfectly true to its own style that we can but cheer: not just at its perfect illustration of elegance and airiness, but also at this vintage, which has long been underestimated.

9 Champagne de Sousa

Mycorhize Extra Brut Grand Cru

18.5 points | 2016 to 2017

The discovery of the tasting – and what a discovery! Never before has this small winery astonished us with such outstanding wines, and this cuvée with its wonderfully delicate oak notes and stunning minerality is the icing on the cake.

10 Champagne Pol Roger

Sir Winston Churchill 2004

18.5 points | 2016 to 2019

One of our favourites from the tasting, not only perfectly developed and perfectly mature, but also immensely stylish made, ideal now: currently the best example from this vintage, whose wines need to be drunk up soon.

BRAND OF THE YEAR: CHAMPAGNE CHARLES HEIDSIECK, REIMS

In every annual champagne special we choose our brand of the year, awarded to a house which has made a particularly positive impression. This year, producers such as Jacquesson, Deutz or Gosset are followed by Charles Heidsieck, an old brand with new dynamism.

The Heidsiecks, who once upon a time immigrated to Champagne from Westphalia to trade cloth and wine, have written sparkling wine history. Florenz-Ludwig made waves in 1811 when he overtook Napoleon's troops on his Russian campaign with a couple of crates of champagne in his luggage ready to celebrate a possible victory, and Charles Heidsieck (1822 to 1871) became "Champagne Charlie" after conquering the American market with his brand founded in 1851. During the American Civil War, he was arrested on suspicion of espionage and was only released when Abraham Lincoln interceded.

This old top-quality brand has remained untouched by the process of concentration occurring among major champagne houses. Since 2011 it has been owned by the Descours family of French entrepreneurs, together with its sister brand Piper Heidsieck, in whose cellars the wine is created. They have big plans for this always exceptionally high-quality brand, which nevertheless remains well-known only to insiders. The exceptional brut has gained a new outfit with a bottle shape reminiscent of one of the "crayères", or chalk cellars, owned by the house in Reims; it has improved distribution and thus availability, and is striving for excellence. Charles Heidsieck should become for Piper what Dom Pérignon is for Moët & Chandon or Dom Ruinart for Ruinart: the absolute best.

Its actual flagship wine, made in small quantities of only around 200,000 bottles per year and left to age for an above-average period of time, is the Blanc de Millénaires 1995. We were almost equally impressed by the brut, a true creation from experienced cellar master Cyril Brun, blended from 60 crus with a (high) 40% proportion of reserve wines (the oldest of which has more than ten years of cellar aging under its belt), matured for at least three years in chalk cellars. The recipe is reminiscent of Krug and is also very similar in taste! Charles Heidsieck is and remains top-level, something it has recently started wanting to make known.



Heidsieck staff with old bottles from the ancient cellar: all of the house's champagnes are left to age for longer than average.

THE TOP HOUSES OF THE YEAR

The classification system in Champagne relates officially to villages and sites rather than wines or brands. For this reason, every year we produce our own (of course terribly serious) classification of the best producers, based on current and past tasting notes. Here is 2015's version:

Première Grande Marque Deutz, Gosset, Krug, Jacquesson
Deuxième Grande Marque Charles Heidsieck, Pol Roger, Dom Pérignon
Troisième Grande Marque Billecart-Salmon, Bollinger, Dom Ruinart, Louis Roederer, Taittinger

Top Small Wineries of the Year Veuve Fourny, de Sousa
Top Cooperatives of the Year Mailly Grand Cru, de Saint Gall
Discovery of the year Champagne Dom Caudron
(Passy-Grigny winemaking cooperative, Marne valley)



CHAMPAGNE 2016: EXCITING AND TOP-QUALITY

Champagne is the most wonderful, most exciting trivial pursuit in the world. To save you from the agony of choice, over the following pages and exclusively for VINUM readers we are presenting 240 top-class bubbles to suit every taste.

As always, we took our time tasting the 250 or so champagnes in this guide, rarely opening more than twelve bottles per session or day, tasting samples the following day, even leaving a bottle to stand until all the sparkle had gone so as to test the quality of the wine itself and its behaviour over time, and also tasted the wines with food. The results speak for themselves: the average standard has never been so high. Virtually no faulty bottles, no wines below 15 points ("good"), with most in the "very good to excellent" bracket. In addition to the scores achieved by small, top-class fine wine producers, a particularly satisfying result was those

achieved by the large global brands: as well as being technically flawless, these are now also flawless in terms of style. Champagne has not been a homogenous entity for a long time. Individuality is a trump card, and there is something for everyone in the following pages. Champagne may be expensive, but the basic materials (grapes) are rare and precious, and compared with other regions Champagne has been stable for years. The top end has coalesced and broadened, and the choice of what is first among equals is often down to the drinker's personal taste. Tasting notes are mnemonic aids to help you find your way through the forest of exceptional wine, not

the gospel truth. Perhaps the only negative element in champagne's development: every house and even every small winery now offers a whole range of wines, from non-vintage brut to rosé to blanc de blancs or blanc de noirs, sometimes with several vintages on the market at once, and an increasing number of brands offer a low-dosage or undosed champagne (Non Dosé, Ultra Brut, Brut Nature). Dosages have dropped significantly in recent years, a clear indication that the basic material - the grapes - has increased in quality. However, is it not precisely this happy, motley jumble of styles and philosophies which sets champagne apart from the sparkling wine scrum?

Although an increasing number of champagne houses are opting to indicate the cellaring date (bottling and champagne method) and the disgorgement date on the back label, or use a number to distinguish between non-vintage bruts (Jacquesson, Lallier), this is far from general practice. This is a pity, as it is ultimately the disgorgement date which determines a champagne's shelf life and optimum drinking time. Our drinking windows relate to the samples tasted, and thus the earliest bottling. However, there are no guarantees that the bottles which consumers buy will be identical to what we tasted, particularly when it is a non-vintage brut. This is in no way a deception, but simply has to do with the fact that champagnes are in principle supplied ready to drink, and that both large and small brands are making every effort to ensure that they bottle a wine of identical style year after year. Nevertheless, there are fluctuations, and our task is therefore to offer a rough estimate of potential for laying down. Only trusted dealers can guarantee that a bottle of non-vintage brut or a vintage champagne is not old stock but rather the latest bottling from the brand in question.

Nevertheless, we came across virtually no noteworthy fluctuations in our regular checks. Once again this year we purchased a dozen sample bottles and compared them with the samples tasted, and also kept a second sample in storage as a "control" which we could also compare at a later date in the event of any problems. We only came across discrepancies twice during this year's tastings: in both cases these were significantly more mature bottlings of the relevant wines (marketed in their millions!) purchased from the catering trade, which were nevertheless still in line with the master style. In one of the two cases we were able to procure a third bottle with the same bottling date, which matched the original sample tasted. Conclusion: as well as the bottling date, it is no surprise that the quality of storage has a key impact on a champagne's shelf life.

Anyone wanting to cellar champagne (and it is worth it!) should therefore purchase multiple bottles and open one to check whether it matches the level of maturity we have described, or ask the dealer to guarantee that they are recently delivered wines which have been stored by said dealer for no longer than six months (non-vintage brut) to 18 months (top vintages) – and, of course, under the best possible conditions.

250
CHAMPAGNES
TASTED

240
CHAMPAGNES
SELECTED

5
CHAMPAGNES WITH
19 OR 20 POINTS

23
CHAMPAGNES WITH
18 POINTS OR OVER

95
CHAMPAGNES WITH
17 POINTS OR OVER

Tasting

We invite around a hundred top champagne producers with a clear presence on the German market to our annual grand champagne tasting. Any absent producers are absent by choice, often because they are not marketing any new wines or do not have any champagnes left in their stocks: examples this year include winemakers such as Selosse, Egly-Ouriet, Paul Bara, René Geoffroy and a few other small operations, and brands such as Castellane and Abel Lepitre.

Rating scale

We use the 20 point scale. A half mark after the decimal point denotes a wine which will most likely develop well once complete and increase its rating.

14 points / 14.5 points

Reliable

Wines which will be extremely appealing on the table in a few years' time, and given positive development could rank as a good example of the vintage, provided that they are offered at a reasonable price.

15 points Good

In keeping with the vintage, a typical example, worthy of confidence provided that the price is right.

15.5 points Good to very good

A good interpretation of the vintage, could be one of the year's very good wines once bottled.

16 points Very good

Great wine, definitely worth buying if the price is right.

16.5 Punkte

Very good to excellent

A great wine which – once bottled – could become one of the vintage's excellent wines.

17 points Excellent

One of the wines of the year, for which buyers can happily dig a little deeper into their pockets.

17.5 points Top wine of the year

One of the best wines of the year,

absolutely world class.

18 points / 18.5 points

Top wine of the decade

World class, one of the most exceptional wines of the decade.

19 to 20 points

Wine of the century

A unique, absolutely top-quality wine on a global scale.

citrus fruit finish and an elegant, delicate bitter note; enjoy now.



Blanc de Blancs 2009

17 points | 2016 to 2017

Jacquot's progress is astonishing. This again shines through in this immensely floral, airy, creamy, stylish, well-balanced Blanc de Blancs with its wonderfully pure qualities, its elegance and class. An aperitif for a tête-à-tête.

Vintage 2008

17 points | 2017 to 2022

The only criticism we can make of this lively, juicy, impetuous wine is its youth, still very mineral, with facility for complexity, great length.

Mosaïque Rosé Édition Limitée

16 points | 2015 to 2017

An elegant, fruity and fresh rosé, prettily packaged, exceptionally made. With light summer cuisine.

Mosaïque

16 points | 2015 to 2016

We have never tasted a classier Brut Mosaïque! Light, immensely clean, dense and juicy and fruity, for all occasions! Magnificent.

CHAMPAGNE JACQUESSON

www.champagnejacquesson.com

Jean-Hervé and Laurent Chiquet would perhaps actually have liked to have been born in Burgundy, ideally in one of the very top climats. However, because they were instead harvesting a not inconsiderable number of hectares (currently around 30) of top-quality champagne vines and in 1974 were able to acquire an ancient brand with a resonant name, they remained true to their native region and began to bottle champagnes displaying some of the vinosity of a Burgundy. And they all lived happily ever after... The Jacquesson success story is something of a fairy tale, propelled literally from nothing to the absolute top, with small production (too small) of distinctive wines from its own or leased vines.



Dizy Corne Bautray 2005

19 points | 2016 to 2017

A magnificent, flawless expression of Pinot which gains in complexity after aeration; delicate spice and prune notes; the stunning expression of fruit is further boosted on the palate, here with notes reminiscent of an outstanding old Armagnac, exquisitely elegant despite the full, ripe structure,

wonderfully round; an impressive wine which should be enjoyed alone, since every sip is writing a piece of champagne style.



Aÿ Vauzelle Terme 2005

18.5 points | 2016 to 2017

This year the two single-site wines were more similar than usual, with the prune notes even more intense here, supplemented by ripe red apples, all with a more intense, weighty, imposing tone. Wonderful with top-quality mature hard cheese. Like a sparkling Burgundy!



734 Dégorgement Tardif

18 points | 2016 to 2017

Jacquesson Bruts bear numbers which change with every bottling. In addition, a small portion (including this wine) is disgorged later after additional maturation: a superb bouquet with wonderful bottle age, pastry, a touch of leather; enormously elegant and refined on the palate, with restrained, polished power, spirited and long, wonderful in this phase, one of the best Jacquesson BSAs we have ever tasted.

Avize Champ Caïn 2005

18 points | 2016

Single-site wines are so much more than just blends of the vintage: the Côte des Blancs wine also indicates the great fullness and ripeness of the base wines, and we would have thought it was a Montagne de Reims. The result is an immensely vinous wine with an almost oily golden apple finish.

Cuvée 738

17.5 points | 2016 to 2019

Such a refined and discreetly spicy bouquet, such impressive structure, immensely creamy, fruity, elegant, yet also vinous and long, superb and stylish (red apples, with a Pinot Noir base).

CHAMPAGNE JOSÉ MICHEL ET FILS

www.champagne-jose-michel.com

José Michel is a living legend. For 60 years (and now with his sons and grandchildren) he has been cultivating ten hectares in Moussy/Marne Valley, planted with equal parts Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier plus a small amount of Pinot Noir (around 10%), defining the character of the outstanding wines.



Special Club 2008

16.5 points | 2017 to 2020

An interesting fruity and spicy bouquet, juicy, refreshing yet also very mineral and crystal-clear style, wonderful length and good youthfulness, as an aperitif or with light or hearty dishes.

Pinot Meunier

16 points | 2016

A refreshing, fruity, immensely easy-drinking champagne with fine bubbles, best enjoyed with nibbles.

K

CHAMPAGNE KRUG

www.krug.com

Krug, currently owned by the LVMH Group but retaining independence as regards technical and stylistic decisions, is and remains a legend, one which despite terroir wines such as Clos de Mesnil or Millésimé is primarily built on the Grande Cuvée – a real compendium of the art of blending. The fact that Krug now has to share the top spot with two or other brands is simply a testament to the competition's tenacity.



Grande Cuvée

17.5 points | 2016 to 2018

We tasted an immensely intense, dense, yet youthful Grande Cuvée with great length and freshness, not lacking in body or complexity, and easily able to age. Of its usual standard.

Krug Rosé

17 points | 2016 to 2017

An immensely elegant, airy, yet also transcendent, slender rosé best enjoyed alone, with a good book or as a dignified aperitif.

L

CHAMPAGNE LALLIER

www.champagne-lallier.fr

When René-James Lallier handed Champagne Deutz over to Roederer (in 1996), he founded his own small company. This was transferred to Francis Tribaut in 2003. The house currently produces around 300,000 bottles of champagne which combine a distinct vinous character with consistently increasing quality.