

David Schildknecht – Wine Advocate

Jacquesson, Dizy (Montagne de Reims)

NV Extra Brut Cuvée 736 Disg. 11/2012 (\$80.00) (Sparkling White) Rating: 93

2004 Extra Brut Dizy Corne Bautray (\$300.00) (Sparkling White) Rating: 94

2004 Extra Brut Avize Champ Cain (\$300.00) (Sparkling White) Rating: 96

2004 Extra Brut Ay Vauzelle Terme (\$300.00) (Sparkling White) Rating: 96

Possessed of vines in a who's-who of disparate Champagne villages supplemented by purchased fruit from a few equally renowned communes in which they do not have holdings, Laurent and Jean-Hervé Chiquet have – particularly over the past decade – led their already successful house along some unusual not to mention unusually successful paths. Virtually all of their wines are bone-dry (and labeled “Extra Brut”) yet come off as admirably balanced, following cask fermentation and aging with malo-lactic transformation, and long stays in bottle pre-disgorgement. In lieu of a conventional non-vintage blend, there is a wine sequentially numbered (allegedly to coincide with the totality of cuvées in Jacquesson history), and dominated by as well as designed to express the character of a single vintage. The estate's upper-tier (and alas, for those of us on any kind of budget, that's spelled with a capital “U”) now features a trio of highly limited, vineyard-designated bottlings whose recently disgorged instantiations are already about as complex as young Champagne can be. I did not visit with the Chiquet brothers this year, and shall look forward to doing so – and to reporting on a wider range of their wines – next year. Based on vintage 2008 with 2007 and 2006 (totaling a third) in supporting roles, and 53% Chardonnay; 29% Pinot; 18% Meunier, the Jacquesson **NV Extra Brut Cuvée 736** delivers a captivating performance in which prominent acidity, bone-dryness and underlying firmness that in lesser hands or from lesser material would come off as spare and austere, here instead blossom into an irresistibly mouthwatering wealth of scents of flavors. Lemon, grapefruit and white peach tinged with their pits and with pungent yeastiness are further allied with hickory nut bitterness, freshly milled cornmeal, mint, chalk, and brine both on the pungent nose and vibrant, gripping palate. Expansive yet productively tense and consummately refreshing, this finishes with cheek-pinching, salivary gland-milking intensity. It should prove rewarding to follow over at least the next 3-5 years, as well as from any subsequent disgorgements. Jacquesson's roughly 5,000 bottles of **2004 Extra Brut Dizy Corne Bautray** issue from (what were then) 44 year-old vines in the cool, breezy upper reaches of the eponymous site. This translates into a metaphorically cool, laid-back wine that for some tasters – and especially when first opened – might seem slightly aloof. But there is dazzling complexity here, as well as the impeccably balance – at near bone dryness – that characterizes all of the Jacquesson bottlings I most recently tasted. Scents of iris, apple pip, peach kernel, quinine, and toasted almond set the tone for piquancy that follows on a palate strongly alkaline in undertone and loaded with bitterness, illusive inner-mouth floral perfume. Imagine chomping from behind on honeysuckle, stem and all, and you have some inkling of the effect. The sense of transparency here is striking, and there is even more to be glimpsed after the wine has been open for a day, with toasted pumpkin seed, lime rind, and an enhanced vividness of iris perfume emerging. A hint of salinity stimulates the salivary glands in the long, interactively complex, and downright thought-provoking finish. This will seduce you only if you meet it more than half way, and it is not about to shed its silken, mineral-sequined shroud. I suspect it will merit following for more than a decade, though I must confess ignorance with older exemplars of this bottling. From vines planted in 1962, the single-vineyard Jacquesson **2004 Extra Brut Avize Champ Cain** leads with an utterly remarkable nose. A greenhouse-like profusion of leafing and flowering things is imposed over sea breeze, with jasmine; musky narcissus; nose-prickling spice as if from some exotic orchid; iodine-tinged toasted shrimp shells; and toasted grain all pungently present and anticipating the elusive complexity delivered on a caressingly polished yet consummately refreshing and almost ethereally delicate palate. Over time, the sense of creaminess and the refinement of bubbles became more evident, along with a contrasting impression of enhanced piquancy, suggesting hops and lentil sprouts, all in the context of remarkable poise and transparency to nuance. The endlessly fascinating finish remains infectiously juicy and subtly yet mouthwateringly saline. Lucky owners should plan to follow bottles for at least a decade. (And at around 10,000 bottles – twice the volume of the corresponding Corne Bautray and four times that of the Vauzelle Terme – there is at least a better chance you can get hold of some. I'm told, though, that only 118 bottles were allocated for the U.S., at least initially, which gives you an idea how regrettably few will have been shipped here of the other two Jacquesson single-vineyard gems.) Jacquesson's 2,500 bottles of **2004 Extra Brut Ay Vauzelle Terme** issue from a 1980 planting whose excellence they have been demonstrating by means of dedicated bottling since 1996, and its latest installment can only enhance the reputation of this rare and rightly expensive wine. Buddleia, wisteria, toasted grains, and a whiff of cocoa powder suggest advanced ripeness, and anticipate the inner-mouth floral profusion and subtly roasted flavors that follow on a polished and expansive palate suffused with superbly integrated, ultra-fine mousse. Nut extracts, dark berry distillates, toasted shrimp shell, chalk and wet stone well up from seemingly inexhaustible depths, while a luscious fruit contingent of juicy white peach, musk melon and quince gains strength as the bottle takes on air; and the floral notes never flag. By the third day, an almost praline-like nuttiness had emerged, along with a musky edge to the perfume and an enhancement of the sweetly saline, saliva-liberating savor of shrimp shell reduction. This novel-length study in a vineyard that would have rung bells with nobody outside Champagne (and scant few insiders) when Jacquesson first subjected it to separate bottling is likely to richly reward lucky owners for a dozen or more years. Vintage 59 Imports, Washington, DC; tel. (202) 966-9218