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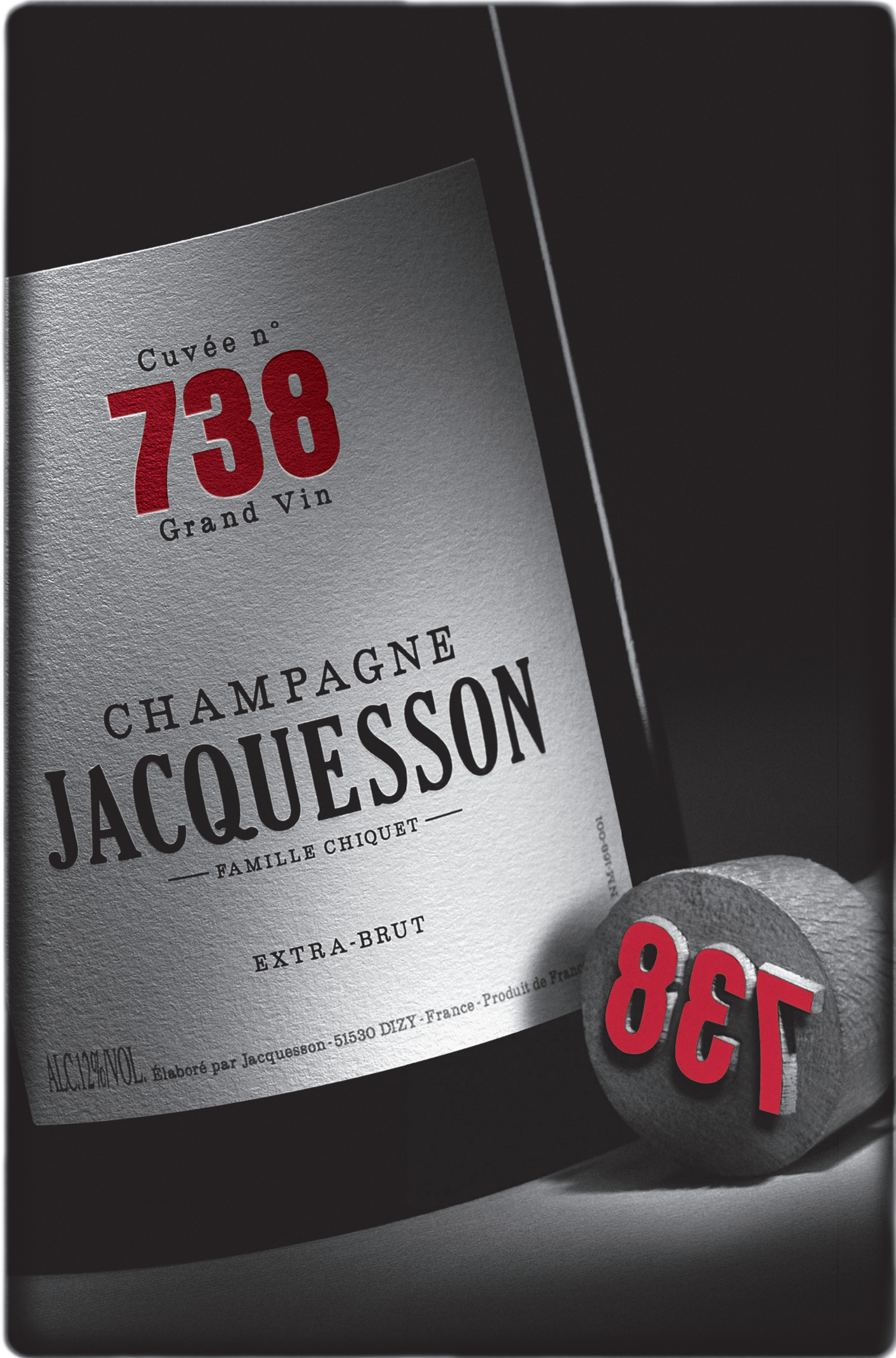
— FAMILLE CHIQUET —

A CONVERSATION WITH JEAN-HERVÉ & LAURENT CHIQUET

It's the ties that bind. The ties that bind the present to the past. The ties that bind the roots to the earth. The ties that bind the vines to the sky and the ties that bind men to the land allowing them to follow their dreams and their convictions. It is also a constant quest, year on year, to seek to reveal the full expression of their *terroirs*, to make the best wine that each vintage allows.



A rendez-vous with two men, brothers, who for twenty five years have quietly been pushing the boundaries in Champagne...



talkywalky.com



1 - WHERE ARE YOUR VINES?

Our land holdings are in two main areas, the *Grande Vallée de la Marne* and in the *Côte des Blancs*. In the *Grande Vallée de la Marne* we have vines in *Aÿ*, a *Grand Cru*, and *Dizy* and *Hautvillers* both *Premiers Crus*; the vineyards are mostly sloping, facing east, south or south-west where the chalk lies at varying depths below the soil. We also have holdings in two *Grand Crus* in the *Côte des Blancs*, *Avize* and *Oiry*; there our parcels face due south, with chalk showing on the surface.

2 - SO, JACQUESSON'S WINES ALL COME FROM THESE VINEYARDS?

Not quite. We still buy some grapes but, with the *Domaine* providing 80% of our needs, our purchases are limited. However, our suppliers are all neighbours in the same *Crus* which allows us to control the husbandry of the vines whose production we are buying and, most importantly, to deliver the grapes to our presses.



its soil and sub-soil, together with the climate that governs it. The distinctive characteristic of the great *terroirs* of Champagne is linked to the thick pedestal of campanian chalk, up to hundreds of metres thick, on which our topsoil sits and to our semi-continental climate, yet where the average temperature is only 10 degrees centigrade.

5 - YOU TALK OF TERROIR AND CLIMATE. SURELY HOW YOU HUSBAND YOUR VINES PLAYS A VITAL ROLE?

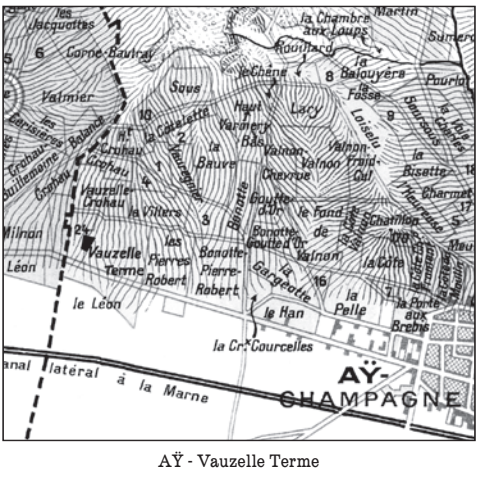
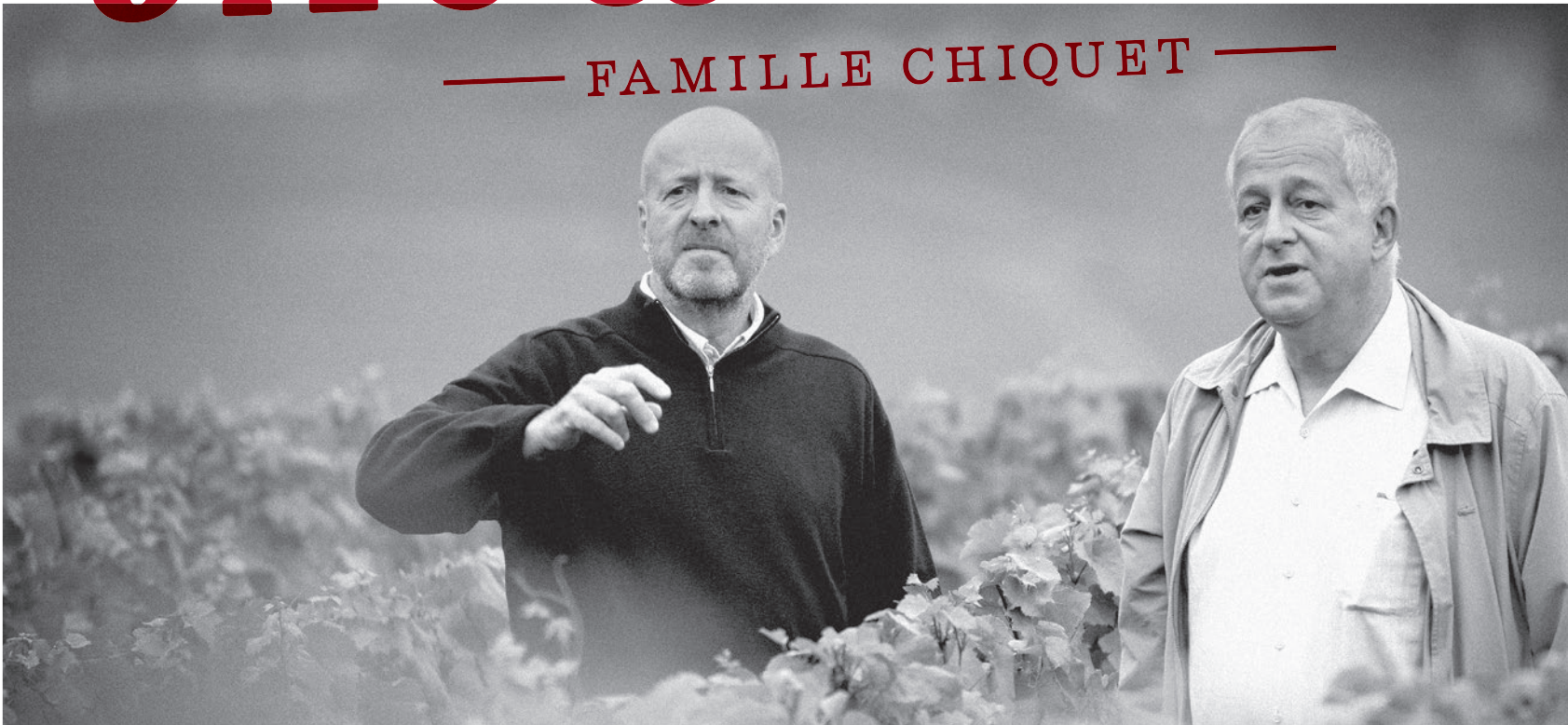
Indeed. We use traditional growing techniques with little or no soil enrichment, the soil is ploughed or sown to grass, we short prune, most treatments are organic.... Above all, we seek to hold back the vigour of our vines in order to allow them to reveal the diversity of the parcels of land on which they are growing and to show the influence of the minerals in the soil on the fruit.

6 - WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN YOUR GRAPES AT HARVEST?

Maturity, above all. Nearly all of the *Premiers* and *Grands Crus* of Champagne are above 49 Degrees north and at this level the lack of acidity is not our principal concern! With the vigour of the vines kept under control, a reasonable yield, grapes delivered in a healthy condition thanks to good foliage canopy management should give us the desired result.

7 - HOW IMPORTANT IS THE PROCESS OF PRESSING YOUR GRAPES?

It is of vital importance. With the larger proportion of white wines being made from



red grapes, we have to avoid maceration and colouring our raw juice. In addition, our northerly latitude means that our stems and pips do not have the maturity that you get in more temperate climes; this solid matter should thus remain intact in order to avoid creating the undesirable tannins and bitterness which would result from being pressed. So we remain wedded to traditional vertical, basket, pressing where the movement of the grapes in



the process is kept to a minimum, thus allowing them to remain intact for longer during extraction so that there is less colour in the juice and fewer tannins. In fact, we attach such importance to this stage that we restrict our purchases only to the same *Crus* where we hold vineyards, allowing us to press 100% of the grapes that we use.

«...not filtered, nor fined; clarification happens naturally.»

8 - WHY IS THAT?

Keeping the grapes intact means that precautions have to be taken. The appellation rules stipulate that grapes have to be picked by hand and encourage pressing as close as possible to the vineyards. When we used to buy grapes from outside our *Crus*, pressing would take place there and we would only receive the juice, over which we had had no quality control. Thus we progressively cut out this practice in the early 2000s.

9 - WHAT HAPPENS TO THE JUICE AFTER PRESSING?

You mean, what happens to the juices? It all depends on the quality. We never use the *tailles*, the second pressing, which are sold elsewhere. Sometimes we even sell first press juice if we consider that the quality is not good enough, in

12 - WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Not much until bottling. We give the wines a good long time in cask and they are bottled quite late, in July for the *Single Vineyards*, and after the following vintage for the *Cuvée 700*.

13 - WHAT IS THE CUVÉE 700 AND WHY THE ODD NAME?

Our *Cuvée 700* is the only blended wine we produce; it is meant to be the expression of a year and thus each year offers a different identity which we recognise by numbering the *cuvée*.

14 - HOW DO THE CUVÉES 700 DIFFER FROM THE "NON-VINTAGE" CHAMPAGNES THAT ONE SEES EVERYWHERE?

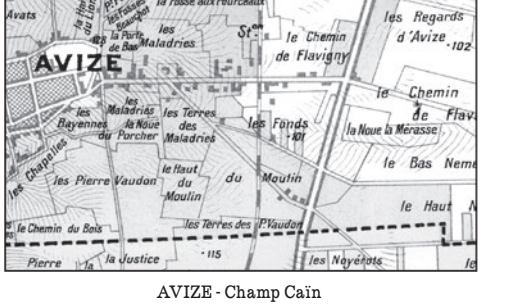
The *Cuvée 700* concept is unique in Champagne and is the opposite of a non-vintage wine! We seek excellence rather than homogeneity, respect for the character of the vintage rather than its denial, and the preference to strive to produce a great wine rather than maintain a "house style". The addition of reserve wines is designed to reinforce the complexity of the wine without hiding the character of the base year. Once we had set out on this path, it quickly became apparent to us that we could not also make a blended vintage wine because this could only harm the quality and purity of the *Cuvée 700*.

10 - YOU CARRY OUT THE VINIFICATION IN OAK CASKS. WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THIS?

Because oak is the only material which allows wine to breathe and because old casks do not transmit the aromas you get from new wood. We also use demi-muids, or 500 litre casks, but only in case of overage or for stocking some reserve wines.

11 - WHAT DO YOU DO DURING VINIFICATION?

Very little. We seek to accompany the wine on its journey. After fermentation, which lasts three or



four months, we do not rack the wine but rather leave it to be nourished by its lees. The lees are stirred on a weekly basis, the wines are not cold stabilised, nor filtered, nor fined; clarification happens naturally.

17 - TWO DIFFERENT STAGES?

Indeed. During the early years of its life, the secondary fermentation in bottles of champagne allows them to develop their effervescence at the same time benefitting from a slow maturing on the lees; with *Cuvée 700*, this means over a period of four years. If you then allow the period of ageing and maturing to go beyond these first three or four years, the wines develop tertiary aromas allied with the freshness conserved by ageing in an environment where there is only the very slightest oxidation; thus you have *Cuvée 700 Dégorgement Tardif* (Late Disgorged), aged for nine years before release.

18 - ARE THERE ANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN A CUVÉE 700 AND THE SAME WINE AS A D.T. WHEN YOU TASTE THEM?

Sure, since they are the same wine. However, they will have aged under completely different conditions and, on tasting, the wines will be very different. The *Cuvée 700* disgorgement takes place between three and a half and four and a half years after the harvest of the base vintage, while the disgorgement of the *Cuvée 700 D.T.* will have taken place four years later; thus we have approximately doubled the time of ageing on the lees and delayed the oxiditative shock of disgorgement by the same amount. In the glass the *Cuvée 700 D.T.* is superior: the wine has matured a lot but evolved very little, it has gained complexity without ageing in any other way.

19 - AND WHAT IS THE AGEING POTENTIAL OF THESE TWO WINES?

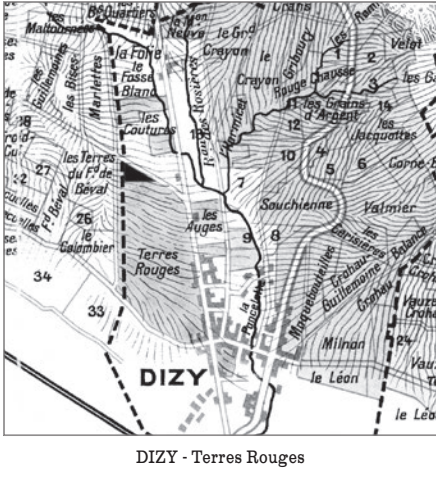
The quality of the base elements of the *Cuvée 700* wines allows them to have exceptional propensity to age, *D.T.* or not. But the *Cuvée 700 D.T.* will have the advantage even if it will fade over the years: spectacular today, still noteworthy after ten years, no doubt it will be more discreet in twenty years' time.

15 - AND WHY 700?

The *Cuvée 700* is a blend of several years and is not allowed to be identified by one of the years involved; logically, it needed to be identified by a number and instead of inventing any old number we decided to give the wine the production number that the *Cuvée* had in our cellar book. *Cuvée n° 1* had been made in 1898 by the House to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Thus it was, with *Cuvée n° 728*, based on the 2000 vintage, that our adventure began.

16 - WHAT ARE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CUVÉE 700?

It comes from our three *Grands Crus* and two *Premiers Crus*, using only the first pressings, is vinified in oak casks, and is nearly always unfiltered. It is thus, above all, a *Grand Vin de Champagne*. It has the potential to age for a remarkably long time which is why we offer it at two different stages of maturity.



22 - IT MUST BE FASCINATING TO TASTE THE FOUR SINGLE VINEYARDS FROM ONE VINTAGE IN PARALLEL.

It's more than interesting! It's one of the only opportunities available in Champagne to compare so precisely wines from different *terroirs* as they mature, the precision of one, the voluptuousness of another, the minerality of a third, the power of the last.

23 - SO, FOUR SINGLE VINEYARDS, THE CUVÉE 700 AND THE CUVÉE 700 D.T. ALL THIS IS PRETTY UNCONVENTIONAL. WHEN DID ALL THIS HAPPEN?

Our wines today are the result of the considerable improvements made in our all our working practices since 1988 when we took over the management of Jacqueson. Since nearly everything else had changed, the wines could not remain the same. However, the changes to the wines happened in a very short period, between 2000 and 2002. In 2000 it was the creation of the *Cuvée 700*, with *Cuvée n° 728*, while 2002 saw the arrival of a range of four single vineyards and the last Vintage blend, a wine which was incompatible with the concept of the *Cuvée 700*. Of course, all these changes took a long time to filter through to the market: the ageing of our wines is not something we can hurry! So, while *Cuvée n° 728* was released at the end of 2003, wine lovers had to wait till 2011 to greet our Single Vineyard wines and it was only in the autumn of 2014 that the first *Cuvée 700 D.T.* was available.

24 - YOU SPEAK MORE OF "WINE" RATHER THAN "CHAMPAGNE"?

That's true but, remember, Champagne is above all a great wine coming from exceptional *terroirs* and one whose complexity stands proud with the best wines in the world. The bubbles make up a certain part of its charm but they are not the be all and end all: a minor wine will always be a minor wine, bubbles or not. At Jacqueson, our ambition is to make great wines...

25 - IS THERE A "JACQUESSON STYLE"?

No doubt there is but this is not something that is done intentionally. We do not seek to have any continuity in style from one year to the next but this seems to appear naturally: it is linked to the quality of our raw material, the typicity of our *terroirs* and our subjectivity. Some people say that the Jacqueson style is nothing more than the taste of the Chiquet brothers. And they wouldn't be wrong!

Promoting a specific *terroir* is in Jacqueson's DNA. Well before we became involved, the *de Tassigny* family (which revived the House's fortunes in 1925 before passing it on to our father some 50 years later) produced a *Blanc de Blancs d'Avize*; this wine was called the BB and did much to increase the reputation of the House at the time. As for us, we are above all wine growers and we very quickly concentrated all our efforts to improve our vineyard practices. This was a sort of rediscovery of our *terroirs* and certain parcels revealed such typicity that we decided to bottle them separately. But not every year and certainly not at any price! In fact, two conditions are necessary to permit the production of a Single Vineyard wine. First, the quality of the vintage must allow the full expression of the character of each *terroir*; second, the *Cuvée 700* takes priority and the Single Vineyards will not be bottled to the detriment of the quality of that wine. For example, *Cuvée n° 739* benefitted enormously

from the inclusion of the magnificent *Dizy Corne Bautreay 2011* which was thus not bottled and whose potential can only be remembered fondly by those of us who tasted it as a still wine.

21 - ARE THE SINGLE VINEYARD WINES HANDLED ANY DIFFERENTLY TO THE CUVÉE 700?

Not at all. From vine to bottle, the process is exactly the same. The Single Vineyards are not treated any better than the *Cuvée 700* or, perhaps we should say, the *Cuvée 700* is not worse treated than the Single Vineyards.

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Dégorgement Tardif