

Champagne

"In Victory, You Deserve It. In Defeat, You Need It..." -Anon



DHALL & NASH
WINERIES IN
CHAMPAGNE



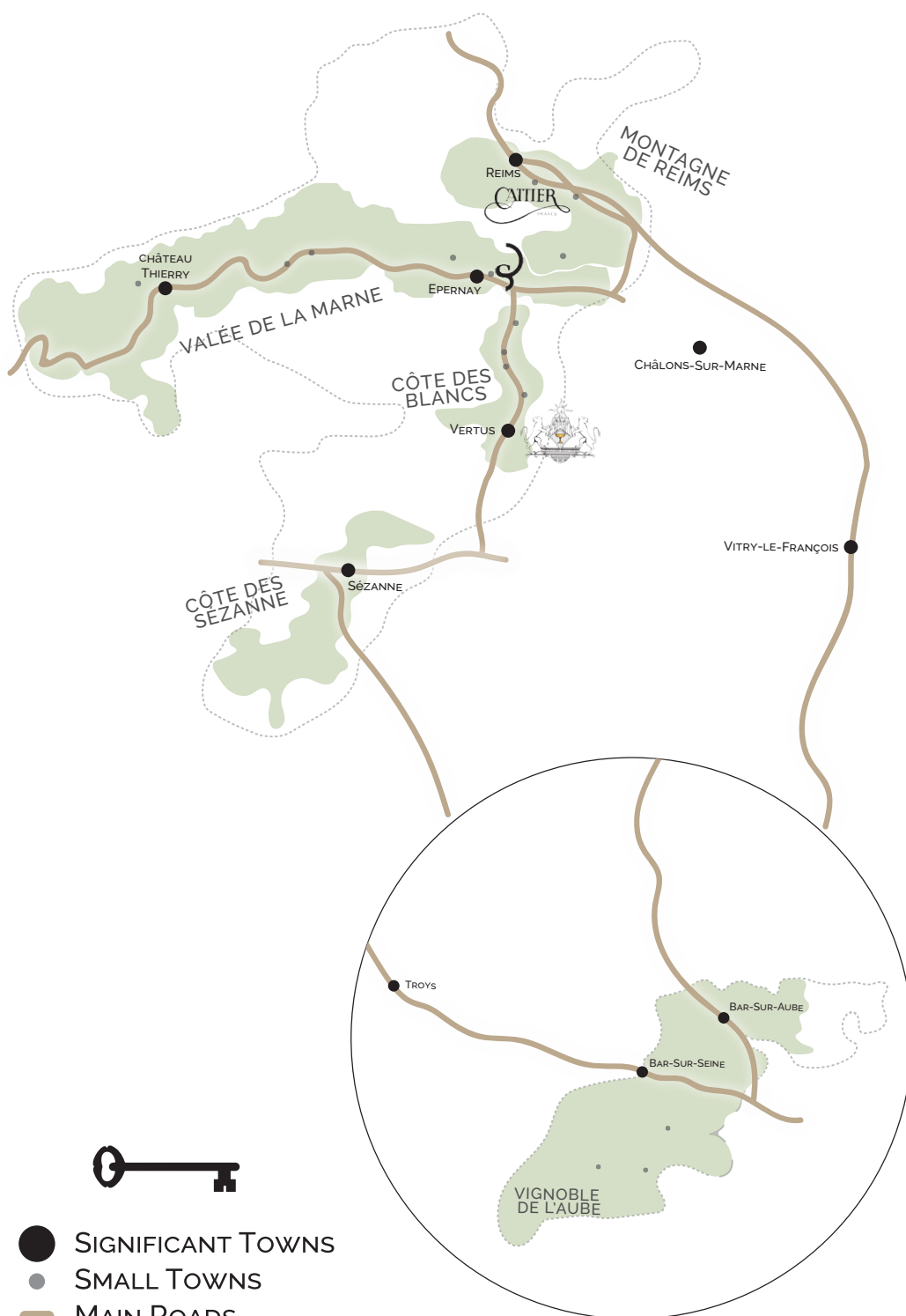
BILLECART
SALMON



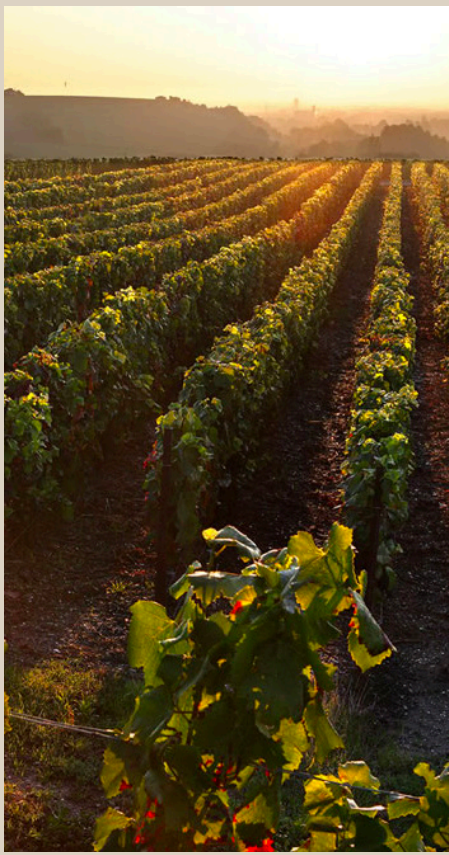
CATTIER



LARMANDIER
BERNIER



- SIGNIFICANT TOWNS
- SMALL TOWNS
- MAIN ROADS
- SUB-REGIONS
- REGIONAL BORDER



VINEYARDS IN CHAMPAGNE -
BILLECART-SALMON



STATUE IN CHAMPAGNE OF
MONK DOM PERIGNON



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& NASH

HISTORY & CULTURE

The wine of Champagne was famous long before it was sparkling.

37 Kings of France were crowned in Reims Cathedral, (the region's Capital), between the ninth and nineteenth centuries. A cluster of monasteries in the region from around the ninth century stimulated winegrowing. The wine was a pale, but intense tasting red. Great medieval markets at one of Europe's busiest crossroads spread the fame. By the 16th Century, Pope Leo X and Kings of England, Spain, France owned vines in the region. In 1575, Champagne was the sole wine at the coronation of Henri III of France.

In terms of the product as we know it today - an effervescent wine with its hallmark bubbles, it is intrinsically unlikely that such an ancient product as Champagne could have an inventor. This has not stopped writers from crediting the birth of Champagne to Dom Pierre Perignon cellarer of the abbey of Hautvillers, near Epernay in the late 17th Century. Dom Perignon was indeed a great winemaker, and was known to be systemising winemaking to make a white wine from black grapes (pinot noir) - he did succeed in making a white wine that could age and improve - but also developed a proportion of his wines with a light fizz - however he saw bubbles as a sign of poor winemaking.

The explanation for the 'fizz' is more likely to emanate from the cellars of the English aristocracy circa 1660. Stronger glass bottles made from coal - with a higher proportion of sand, and fired at higher temperatures than the wood fired furnaces of Venice, combined with cork as opposed to wax, meant that wines imported by cask from Champagne and bottled under this new glass and cork, began to demonstrate a secondary fermentation. Samuel Pepys - author and parliamentarian mentioned 'sparkling champagne' in 1664. By the early 1700's consumers across France and England were enjoying sparkling Champagne. However the process was still uncontrolled and exploding bottles were a big problem to be overcome.

It wasn't until the early 19th century that the process began to be mastered. By 1813 Degorgement was first practiced (removal of yeast sediment from secondary fermentation), By 1820's corking machines and wine muzzles came in and most importantly in 1837, precise calculations for sugar quantities to induce secondary fermentation reliably were developed. By the 1840's the sparkling wine business of Champagne was well established.

As demand increased. Producers began to seek out cheaper grapes from other regions. At the start of the 20th Century as much as 96% of crops were coming from outside Champagne. Tensions rose so high that the vine-growers of Champagne started to riot. This prompted the Government to start enforcing area-specific legislations as to where Champagne grapes could be grown. Soon after, the quickly-impending First World War became a very real threat to the whole country. The war took a heavy toll on Champagne, with many vineyards reduced to rubble and bomb-pits. At the end of the war the French Government laid down a series of laws that would be the foundation for the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) system. Soon after this, World War II erupted and brought a number of troops to the region. Ultimately, it was in Reims that the German Military Commander offered an unconditional surrender to General Eisenhower. World War historians would come to say that the last explosions of the war were the popping of Champagne corks.

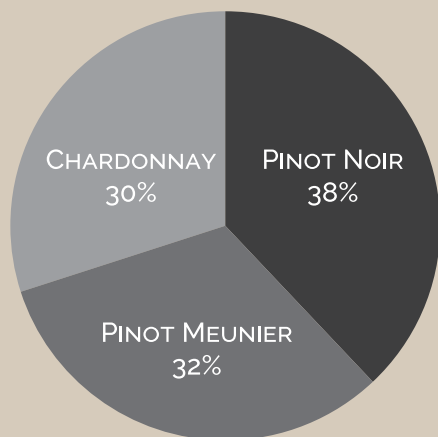
TERROIR

GEOGRAPHY, CLIMATE, GEOLOGY, SOIL & HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

Of all the fabled winegrowing slopes on the planet, none are more formidable than these for ripening grapes.

The region lies 145 km North East of Paris in France. 84,000 individual vineyards, 275,000 individual plots. There are five distinct zones within the region - Montagne de Reims, the coolest zone with all three grape varieties planted and containing nine Grand Cru villages; Vallee de la Marne, lower lying with less chalk, more clay - well known for the black grapes particularly pinot meunier; Côte des Blancs, the finest zone for Chardonnay particularly along its east ridge; The Aube, the most southerly zone, rich in clay and kimeridge marl (also found in Chablis) - vines are 80% pinot noir; Côte de Sezanne plantings established only since 1960, mainly chardonnay with a rich slightly exotic feel.

Champagne's terroir is unique and diverse. It boasts a dual-climate, a lime sub-soil and a rolling, hilly terrain. The average annual temperature here is an icy 10°C. There is a 'tension' between continental and oceanic weather. In fact the balance of the oceanic push and continental neutrality is the story of Champagne and its diverse climate. In February 1985 temperatures plummeted to -22°C, killing vines.



A BRUT CHAMPAGNE AND
A ROSÉ CHAMPAGNE

TERROIR CONTINUED

GEOGRAPHY, CLIMATE, GEOLOGY, SOIL & HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

Ancient oceans have left Champagne the gift of a chalk/limestone subsoil. The limestone is very porous, so it both aids in drainage and acts as a reservoir that keeps the vines hydrated year-round. The calcium compounds are what gives many of the wines their signature chalky minerality.

The hills of Champagne are very distinctive. So much so, in the 17th Century, Champagne wine was known as Vin de Coteaux, or “Wine of the Slopes.” The hillsides provide excellent drainage, whilst the angles mean the vines can take advantage of the sunlight. Champagne has one of the lowest levels of sunshine hours, so any extra exposure is welcomed. The average slope of the region is 12°, though some hills measure up to 59°. The best vineyards are all on slopes rising from 80m to 210m. Above this are the woods of the Montagne and the Cotes de Blancs.

WINE STYLES & VARIETIES

Chardonnay: Chardonnay currently makes up 30% of Champagne’s yields. The white-skinned grape boasts characteristic floral and citrus notes.

Pinot Meunier: This red-skinned grape accounts for 32% of Champagne’s plantings. It is a particularly robust variety and is good for adding a round quality to the wines.

Pinot Noir: Pinot Noir is the predominant grape variety in Champagne, making up 38% of plantings. It has characteristic rich berry notes and gives the wines structure.

Blanc de Blancs: This is the title given to wines comprised entirely of Chardonnay grapes.

Blanc de Noirs: This is the title given to wines comprised entirely of Pinot Noir and/or Pinot Meunier.

Rosé: Champagnes with a pink hue, either through leaving the clear juice of black grapes to macerate on its skins briefly, or by adding a small percentage of Pinot Noir wine to the white, sparkling cuvée.

Brut: Brut Champagne is a dry-style of Champagne with a very low sugar content. The most common style of Champagne.

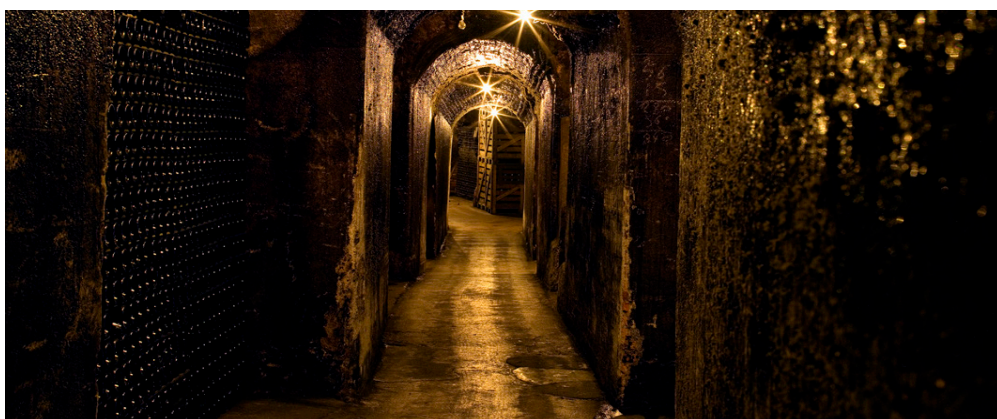
Demi-Sec: Demi-Sec Champagnes are wines with a noticeable level of sugar in the dosage, though they are not syrupy.

Doux: Doux Champagnes have the highest sugar content at >50g/l. They are a rare style.

Grand Cru: Grand Crus are wines which are sourced from villages which have been given a quality rating of 100% as dictated by the Échelle des Crus (Quality Ladder.)

Premier Cru (1er Cru): Premier Crus (Or 1er Crus,) are wines which are sourced from villages which have been given a quality rating of 90-99% as dictated by the Échelle des Crus.

Grand Marque: A house belonging to the Institut des Grandes Marques de Champagne, which dates from 1882. 26 members and many of today’s leading Maisons.



AGING CELLARS OF BILLECART-SALMON



HAND-HARVESTING -
BILLECART-SALMON



CHAMPAGNE MATURING AND
FERMENTING IN BOTTLE -
CATTIER/ARMAND DE BRIGNAC

METHODS & MAKING

Pressing: Selective harvesting and gentle pressing to produce clear juice. All grapes are handpicked and pressed nearby as whole bunches in 4 tonne lots. By law only the first 2550 litres of juice from the lot may be used yielding 10,000 litres per hectare. The 'cœur de la cuvee' (the heart) is the middle of the pressing yielding the purest juice. The 'Tailles' is coarser, inferior juice at the end of the pressing.

Settling: Debourage - settling of solids to draw clear juice from the top (taken to another level by Billecart-Salmon who perform a second settling at cold temperature producing particularly exquisite and fresh Champagnes.

First Fermentation: As with all table wines - The magical process of sugar to wine.

Malolactic Fermentation: Many houses convert tart malic acid to softer lactic acid (Notable exception Maison Salon).

Assemblage: Skillful blending is Champagne's answer to erratic seasons - Different lots, varieties and vintages. Chardonnay (for structure, elegance, finesse), Pinot Noir (for perfume, body and richness), Pinot Meunier (for plump fruitiness) to make the Cuvée. It is the blend more than anything else that determines the non-vintage signature house style.

Reserve Wines: Non-vintage wines are deepened by a portion of older vintage or 'reserve' wines.

Tirage: Prior to bottling to induce secondary fermentation - addition of sugar and wine .

Bottling: Wine is bottled and sealed under crown seal.

Secondary fermentation: The tirage induces a secondary fermentation (prise de mousse). Under the pressure of a sealed bottle Carbon Dioxide produced dissolves into the wine. The finer the still wine and the cooler the cellar - the finer the bubbles.

Maturation: Acidity is the key to Champagne, but its astringency makes these wines unapproachable in their youth. Time softens the wine and the dead yeast cells (lees) also contribute to the complexity. Mandatory minimum is 15 months and the best houses mature their vintage wines for 7-8 years.

Riddling: In the early nineteenth Century, Antoine Muller, cellar master of the widow Cliquot invented a method of cleaning the wine of the sediment created, without losing the bubbles. The bottle is twisted a quarter rotation each day and slowly lifted from horizontal to vertical in wooden pupitres. The sediment gathers in the neck of the bottle. A 'Riddler' turns 50,000 bottles each day.

Disgorgement: After riddling the neck of the bottle is frozen, the crown seal removed and the sediment shoots out, leaving clean bubbly wine inside.

Dosage: To replace the volume lost through disgorgement the bottle is topped up with a sweetened wine (ingredients are often a house secret).



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