

WINES THAT ARE MOSTLY APPROACHABLE WITH ENJOYMENT NOW

VINTAGE CHAMPAGNE AND ENGLISH SPARKLING WINE LEMONS AND LIMES

Tom Stevenson introduces a tasting shared with Essi Avellan MW and Michael Edwards to discover whether the latest releases of the best English sparkling wines can stand shoulder to shoulder with the latest releases of prestige cuvée and Vintage Champagnes

This was always going to be a difficult (albeit thoroughly enjoyable) tasting, due not only to the merging of English sparkling wines and Champagnes but also because the wines were the latest releases, thus not always fully formed, and came from as many as 12 different and disproportionately represented vintages extending back as far as 1990. If the objective was to spot *le rôti de boeuf*, then the contest was null and void before it started, because it would be illegal to sell 2010 or 2009 (the latest English releases) as Vintage Champagne. Not that it mattered, since the linear purity of orchard fruits and extraordinarily high ripe acidity screamed their Englishness so loudly that identifying the Anglo-Saxon interlopers was seldom a test of skill. On the other hand, if the objective was to see if the quality of English sparkling wine could be compared to that of Champagne, how on earth could we pitch the 2010, 2009, and 2008 English vintages against Champagnes that ranged from 2006 to 1990? Comparison is thus impossible as far as the specifics of this tasting are concerned, but comparison of the potential of these two regions is perhaps long overdue.



volumes of ripe Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier grapes at such a low potential alcohol and with comparatively high ripe acidity levels. So, if we are going to compare England with Champagne, the first and most important detail to look at has to be the number of days between the flowering and harvest. This ultimately determines the quality—and according to Champagne lore, it should be at least 100 days for the highest possible quality. Using the industry's standard data to determine the number of days can be grossly misleading, however. This is because the dates of flowering and harvest

recorded by the CIVC (Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne) are the dates of commencement for the region, and obviously there is no relevance in the number of days between the first day of flowering for one variety in one part of the region (usually Chardonnay on the Côte des Blancs) and the first day of harvest for another variety in a different area (often Pinot Noir in the Aube).

While commencement dates for the flowering and harvesting of individual vines would be ludicrously impractical, the "peak" dates for the flowering and harvesting for each of the three varieties of vine in the same area of the same village is a realistic possibility, and the data provided would be meaningful. The peak date for flowering is usually when approximately 75 percent of the vines are in flower, while the peak harvesting date is simply the day when the vines in that particular area are picked. To represent any true significance for an entire region would, of course, require the study of a statistically viable number and spread of such areas, but for an exploratory article such as this, one

Original illustration by Charles Martin, L'Art de Boire, Etablissements Nicolas, Paris, 1920

1 / Comparative dates of peak flowering and peak harvest in two vineyards and the number of days between them (2007-10)

Year	Region	Peak flowering			Peak harvest					
		Ch	PN	PM	Ch	Days	PN	Days	PM	Days
2007	Champagne	May 25	May 28	May 30	Sep 2	100	Sep 1	96	Sep 1	94
	SE England	Jun 20	Jun 20	Jun 20	Oct 4	106	Oct 3	105	Oct 2	104
2008	Champagne	Jun 14	Jun 16	Jun 17	Sep 21	99	Sep 22	98	Sep 20	95
	SE England	Jun 30	Jul 1	Jul 1	Oct 15	107	Oct 13	104	Oct 13	104
2009	Champagne	Jun 11	Jun 14	Jun 16	Sep 16	97	Sep 16	94	Sep 17	93
	SE England	Jun 29	Jun 30	Jun 30	Oct 9	102	Oct 1	93	Oct 7	99
2010	Champagne	Jun 16	Jun 19	Jun 21	Sep 18	94	Sep 19	92	Sep 22	93
	SE England	Jun 28	Jun 28	Jun 28	Oct 12	106	Oct 1	95	Sep 30	94

area in Champagne and one in England should suffice. The data in the table above was originally sourced for a presentation at the Cool Climate Symposium in Tasmania in February 2012. Since one of the producers involved provided the data on a confidentiality-of-origin basis, I

is very close to the average for the 2000s, as we can see from figure 2 (*overleaf*). The producer who provided the Champagne data actually had this level of detail for each variety going back to 1945, and from this we can see that only in the 1980s did Champagne achieve an average of 100 days.

Champagne is located on the cusp of a climate that will only just permit the production of sparkling wine. Go any farther north, and the grapes will not ripen on a commercial scale

have not named either source. I have indicated, however, the general area of the country where the English vineyard is located, and I can reveal that the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vineyards in Champagne are well-exposed sites in famous grand cru villages. Furthermore, the producers in question are both regular award winners, so it is safe to assume that these locations all rank among the best in their respective regions.

As we can see from the table, when using the peak-flowering date rather than relying on the commencement date, and linking flowering and harvesting dates to each variety of vine, Champagne struggles to achieve its magical minimum target of 100 days, hitting it just once in 12 opportunities over a period of four years. In fact, the average for all three varieties over the four-year period is just 95.4 days, compared to an average of 101.6 days for Southeast England. The Champagne data is not an anomaly. Indeed, it

Champagne struggles to magical minimum of 100 days That said, Champagne either hit its target or came within less than one percentile point throughout four of the past six decades. It was only during the 1960s and 2000s that Champagne failed to meet its own minimum standards by a significant margin. Evidently, the southeast of England

Tom Stevenson's top wines

- Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 1995 20
- Charles Heidsieck Brut 2000 19
- Joseph Perrier Cuvée Joséphine 2004 19
- Dom Pérignon Brut 2003 *18.5
- Drappier Grande Sèndrée 2004 18.5
- Alfred Gratien Brut Cuvée Paradis 18.5
- Henriot Brut 2005 18.5
- Perrier-Jouët Belle Époque 2004 18.5
- Ridgeview Victoria Rosé 2009 18.5
- Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin Brut La Grande Dame 2004 18.5
- Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne 2000 18
- Pierre Gimonnet Special Club Premier Cru Chardonnay 2005 18
- André Jacquart Blanc de Blancs 2005 18
- Lanson Noble Cuvée de Lanson 2000 18
- Piper-Heidsieck Brut 2004 18
- Palmer & Co Brut 2004 18
- Pol Roger Brut 2002 18
- De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 18
- Vilmart & Cie Premier Cru 2004 18
- Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin Brut 1990 18

Average and range of scores

	Average	Range
Michael Edwards	15.5	12-17.5
Simon Field MW	15.5	4-18.5
Tom Stevenson	15	0-20
All wines	15.5	0-20

2 / Days between peak flowering and peak harvest, Champagne

Decade	Average
1950s	99.1
1960s	97.9
1970s	99.1
1980s	100.5
1990s	99.6
2000s	95.8

manages to stretch the ripening process significantly longer than Champagne, though harvesting later in the year is inherently risky. It is also risky for Champagne, but it is a much greater gamble in England.

One of the prices that Champagne must pay for being the world's greatest sparkling wine is the near inevitability that it will rain during the harvest. Champagne is located on the cusp of a climate that will only just permit the production of sparkling wine. Go any farther north, and the grapes will not ripen on a commercial scale. A mid- or late-September harvest is considered ideal for quality in Champagne, but it is only successful in those years when the harvest is completed under dry and sunny conditions, which is an uncommon occurrence to say the least. September is typically wet and windy, often from the tail end of the hurricanes that go up the American eastern seaboard before crossing the Atlantic to dump part of the ocean on the UK and France. It is even riskier in England, because the UK is that much more Atlantic-influenced than Champagne, and this is itself exacerbated by a harvest that is three or four weeks later than in Champagne. From the point of view of extended veraison, it could be said that the climate for English sparkling wine is too good, stretching the ripening process beyond that of Champagne into even more extreme weather at harvest time. Like Champagne, when everything comes together just right, England has the potential to produce stunning quality.

The alcohol and acid test

As for any broader conclusions that might be drawn, this would be much more satisfactory over a period of ten years, but it is nevertheless fascinating to compare the actual figures achieved for each variety over four years (fig.3, below).

For anyone reading this who thinks the total acidity data for Champagne might be rather high, this is because it has been expressed as tartaric acid, which is the norm for most of humanity, whereas it is traditional in Champagne and throughout France to express total acidity as sulfuric acid. Due to the influence of (nicely) acidic years in Champagne such as 2010 or 2008, over just four years of data, the average total acidity is a tad high and the pH somewhat low, but the alcohol is spot on. Here, at least, we can see how and why English sparkling wines are so easily identifiable on acidity alone in blind tastings, even though there are some famous incidents where individual tasters have embarrassingly failed to accomplish this simple task. The pH of English sparkling wine is akin to that of Champagne in bygone years. I know some English sparkling producers who, despite the extreme lateness of harvest, tend to give the grapes more hang-time than the data in fig.1 (previous page), but even from these averages, the question is whether English sparkling-wine grapes with a 9.4% ABV are as ripe as 9.9% ABV Champagne grapes. The acidity of English sparkling-wine grapes is higher and the pH lower, but with a significantly longer veraison that does not necessarily mean the grapes are less ripe. Or does it?

To determine the relative ripeness of these particular Champagne and English grapes, we need to examine their malic acid content relative to their total acidity (fig.4, opposite). This has nothing to do with so-called physiological ripeness—a term I do not like or agree with and certainly a concept I do not want to get into here. We are just looking at a belt-and-braces proportion of malic acid. Without wishing to confuse the issue, it is not possible simply to add the amount of tartaric acid to the amount of malic (converted to tartaric) and expect it to come out anywhere near the total

acidity. To give a specific example, a breakdown of the 2009 Champagne Chardonnay total acidity of 11.1g/l is 6.4g/l malic acid (equivalent of 7.2g/l tartaric), 8.7g/l tartaric acid, and 0.2g/l citric acid (equivalent 0.19g/l tartaric). If we add them up, it comes to almost 16.1g/l, yet the total acidity is just 11.1g/l. That is why I refer to a belt-and-braces proportion. It is legitimate to index a ratio of tartaric to total acidity, but you will have to forgive my use of the word proportion, because it is by no means a proportion in terms of a percentage of the total acidity. There are other factors involved, but obviously the smaller the proportion of malic acid, the riper the grapes. The column to the right of the malic acid in fig.4 is the ratio index of malic to total acidity. The rough-and-ready conclusion after examining these figures is that English grapes are not as ripe Champagne grapes, though English

are ambitious and stringent in their quality control, who establish their vineyards properly and fight the elements to produce the best possible quality, easily exceed the average quality in Champagne and, in some years, reach a level that is the equivalent of truly fine Champagne. The number of such producers in England is small, however, compared to the number of brands available. The best English producers run their businesses at a much greater risk level than any Champagne producer, but they stand to gain the most if and when climate change brings with it warmer climes. Champagne has already experienced rising temperatures, with the growing season averaging 57.7°F (14.3°C) over 40 years from the 1950s up to and including the 1980s, jumping to 59°F (15°C) in the 1990s, and doing a Baumgartner in the 2000s, when the average

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Chardonnay comes closest. If we extract the Chardonnay figures and look at them on their own, we can see that at an average potential alcohol of 9.3%, the ratio of 9.3g/l malic acid to 15.3g/l total acidity is 60.1, compared to a very slightly smaller ratio of 59.2 for the 7.3g/l of malic acid to 12.3g/l of total acidity for Champagne's Chardonnay grapes coming in at an average potential alcohol of 10%.

was 61.8°F (16.6°C). For the first time in its history, the 2000s saw three August harvests. If this continues, it will become very problematic, because in September there is a diurnal difference of 18–27°F (10–15°C), whereas in August it is just 9°F (5°C), and acids plummet. It was all very well producing a one-off oddity of some class in 2003. But to have to cope with such climatic conditions on a more regular basis would be no joke—whereas for English vineyards, every additional degree Celsius in the growing season enables growers to pick riper and earlier and still maintain a welcome diurnal difference.

Conclusion: the risk factor

England can produce grapes that are almost as good as those in Champagne, and those English producers who

3 / Comparisons of ABV, TA, and pH of two vineyards' Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier (2007–10)

Year	Variety	ABV		TA		pH	
		Champagne	SE England	Champagne	SE England	Champagne	SE England
2007	Chardonnay	9.3%	9.5%	12.9	15.0	3.01	2.94
	Pinot Noir	9.5%	10.0%	13.5	12.8	3.02	3.07
	Pinot Meunier	9.5%	9.8%	13.2	12.4	3.04	3.04
2008	Chardonnay	10.0%	9.4%	12.9	16.7	3.00	2.95
	Pinot Noir	9.7%	10.4%	14.0	14.1	2.95	2.99
	Pinot Meunier	9.8%	9.5%	13.1	15.2	2.99	2.99
2009	Chardonnay	10.3%	9.5%	11.1	13.9	3.09	2.90
	Pinot Noir	10.3%	9.9%	11.5	14.1	3.06	2.99
	Pinot Meunier	10.2%	9.9%	11.8	12.9	3.08	2.90
2010	Chardonnay	10.3%	8.7%	12.2	15.6	3.06	3.00
	Pinot Noir	10.2%	8.3%	12.9	15.7	3.04	2.92
	Pinot Meunier	9.5%	8.2%	13.5	15.0	3.05	2.90
Average		9.9%	9.4%	12.7	14.5	3.03	2.97

ABV = alcohol by volume (actual potential, unassisted); TA = total acidity (expressed as grams of tartaric acid per liter)

4 / Comparisons of TA, malic, and the ratio of malic to TA in two vineyards' Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier (2007–10)

Year	Variety	Total acidity		Malic acid	Ratio, malic:TA	Malic acid	Ratio, malic:TA
		Champagne	SE England				
2007	Chardonnay	12.9	15.0	8.2	63.6	9.5	63.3
	Pinot Noir	13.2	12.8	9.0	68.2	10	78.1
	Pinot Meunier	13.5	12.4	8.8	65.2	9.8	79.0
2008	Chardonnay	12.9	16.7	7.3	56.6	9.4	56.3
	Pinot Noir	13.1	14.1	8.0	61.1	10.4	73.8
	Pinot Meunier	14.0	15.2	7.4	52.9	9.5	62.5
2009	Chardonnay	11.1	13.9	6.4	57.7	9.5	68.3
	Pinot Noir	11.8	14.1	6.8	57.6	9.9	70.2
	Pinot Meunier	11.5	12.9	7.6	66.1	9.9	76.7
2010	Chardonnay	12.2	15.6	7.2	59.0	8.7	55.8
	Pinot Noir	13.5	15.7	8.0	59.3	8.3	52.9
	Pinot Meunier	12.9	15.0	8.5	65.9	8.2	54.7
Average		12.7	14.5	7.8	61.1	9.4	66.0

Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 1995 (12% ABV) - 19

ME: A great mature Chardonnay Champagne, almost certainly. Now more Spanish gold than Welsh gold; fine bead of tiny bubbles. On first opening, the aromas are surprisingly taut and clenched—is this perhaps a new recent disgorgement, to freshen up a 17-year-old wine. But with air, that lovely scent of toasty, roasty hazelnuts soars up. The fruit, though beautifully ripe, is perhaps more loose-limbed and less intense than I remember in recent years, but this is still a memorable, exceptional Champagne that may start to decline very slowly from 2013. I have taken half a mark off my score, because the wine is at, or nearly at, its peak for me. **18**

SF: Lovely evolved nose; truffle and hints of mushroom; evolved, indeed, to within an inch of perfection; a benchmark for those who love rich styles that are adamant in their vinosity and sparkling to their very core. **18.5**

TS: Absolutely gorgeous toasty-rich fruit of the most amazing richness, purity, and finesse. **20**

Charles Heidsieck Brut 2000 (12% ABV) - 18

ME: Seductive, with a lovely balance of toastiness, richness, and finesse. Quite forward. **17.5**

SF: Deep Spanish gold and a suitably evolved nose; hints of truffle, wood smoke, and forest floor. Palate is rich, with praline, brioche, and hints of Bergamot; the wine is dense and textured, with no shortage of personality and a fine, tapered finish. **17.5**

TS: Gloriously toasty, mellowed fruit; deliciously tangy richness. **19**

Lanson Noble Cuvée de Lanson 2000 (12.5% ABV) - 17.5

ME: Tighter and more mineral but with considerable complexity, class, and future. **17**

SF: Elegant, slightly lactic nose, redeemed by hints of hazelnut and yellow plum. Palate is rich, layered, and still quite energetic. Fine balancing acidity and a pirouette at the finish in deference to sheer quality. **17**

TS: Intense grapefruit/citrus fruit; needs time. Has impressive potential. Could do with more time on yeast but definitely needs more post-disgorgement aging. **18**



Palmer & Co Brut 2004 (12% ABV) - 17.5

ME: A nice golden ripeness to this wine; a big step up: rich, ripe, but with fine, fine elegance and vigor. Exceptional. **17.5**

SF: Rich, evolved, oaky Pinot nose; suave and savory; hints of toast and wood smoke, the songs of the forest. The palate indulges

the burned-match fiesta with energy and vigor. **17.5**

TS: Rich, gunpowder fruit, with peaches on the finish. **18**



Joseph Perrier Cuvée Joséphine 2004 (12% ABV) - 17.5

ME: A fuller, fruited style, orchard as well as citrus flavor. Good acidity and balance. **15.5**

SF: Attractive lemon-gold color, with lively mousse and a forward honeyed nose; the palate is broad, with fine chalky acidity at the back, a silky texture, and elegant Chardonnay profile. Dextrous and refined. **17.5**

TS: Classy, has finesse and freshness, yet beautifully mellow and mature. Crisp, long, lingering finish. **19**

Veuve Clicquot Brut 1990 (12% ABV) - 17.5

ME: Rich wines redolent of mushrooms and truffles; great wide appeal but also serious. Still excellent. **17.5**

SF: Impressive nose of praline, truffle, and *la recherche du temps perdu*. Palate is edgy and complex, with wood smoke, verbena, spiced toast, and walnut all harmoniously evidenced. Robustly delicate and beautifully textured. **17.5**

TS: Intriguing celery-dominated fruit. Idiosyncratic, but I love it! **18**

Veuve Clicquot Brut La Grande Dame 2004 (12.5% ABV) - 17.5

ME: More vigor and punch, racy Chardonnay in the driving seat. Long, with a fine attack—for crustaceans, especially oysters. **17**

SF: Spring flowers on the nose, allied to chalk and hints of dried fruit. Palate has precise linear acidity, precision, and cerebral regality on the finish. **17.5**

TS: Rich and classy, this is really tip-top Champagne, à point yet capable of gliding along at this peak of perfection for a year or two before a long, slow, and graceful descent. **18.5**



Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne 2000 (12.5% ABV) - 17

ME: Open, rich. Perhaps a slight lack of acidity but giving pleasure now. **16**

SF: Deep color and a touch oxidative of aroma; an attractive and generous wine nonetheless. Vanilla and cream dominate the front of the palate and cede to gentle autolytic notes at the back. Textured and poised: a very complete and ready wine. **17**

TS: Malolactic aromas are overwhelmed (which is good), but they will eventually make this a gloriously creamy, biscuity Champagne. **18**

Alfred Gratien Brut Cuvée Paradis (12% ABV) - 17

ME: Pale yellow, green tints; nice flowing cordon; that limelike character on nose—quite recently disgorged, perhaps. Fresh green-fruit character, a little reined in today—better in six months but essentially quite sound. **15**

SF: Deep color, then assertive oaky nose with evident hints of patisserie, peach stone, and forest floor. Palate is rich, honeyed, and pleasingly decadent, with vanilla, figs, sour honey, and ripe orchard fruit all entwined with magnificent abandon. **17**

TS: High acids, very rich, creamy, intense berry fruits, creaminess highlighted by acids dominating the finish. **18.5**



Henriot Brut Cuvée des Enchanteleurs 1998 (12% ABV) - 17

ME: Fine note of ripeness of the August sun and late-given acidity in September. **16.5**

SF: Honeyed aroma, rich color; palate finely nuanced, with plenty of energy and power; impressively crafted and long. **17**

TS: Deliciously rich, yeast-complexed, breadly fruits. Delicious. **17.5**

André Jacquart Blanc de Blancs 2005 (12.5% ABV) - 17

ME: Softer and a bit more expressive than [Pierre Gimonnet Special Club Premier Cru Chardonnay 2005], with a yeasty autolytic touch. **15.5**

SF: Honeysuckle and lemongrass; oak-oil and an 8th arrondissement patisserie on a warm afternoon; a cornucopia of potential in various stages of realization; viscosity and enigmatic weave; a feast of indulgence. **17**

TS: Oak-fermented and gunpowder aromas, with peaches on the palate. What a combination! This is either something special that needs time in bottle or a total disaster, and I'm leaning toward the former. **18**

Pol Roger Brut 2002 (12.5% ABV) - 17

ME: A richer, very harmonious style, opening up already. **16**

SF: Forward, with a flattering, ripe, appley nose, with hints of exotica and spice. The palate is vinous and matted, with sour honey sitting pleasantly alongside the usual patisserie descriptors. **17**

TS: Very fresh, breezy fruit for a ten-year-old wine. Yeast-complexed, breadly fruit. **18**



Ridgeview Victoria Rosé 2009 (12.5% ABV) - 17

ME: Confectioner's candy-store scents, and I don't mean pejoratively. Pleasing and friendly, without loss of freshness. **16**

SF: Elegant copper onion-skin color and a nose that is discrete and playful at the same time—red fruits and spice given discretionary hearings. Palate is dry, understated, and quite serious. A minor key, intelligently interpreted. **16.5**

TS: Beautifully delicate rosé sparkling wine; definitely English, but definitely classy. **18.5**

Dom Ruinart Brut Blanc de Blancs 2002 (12.5% ABV) - 17

ME: Subtle and classy, 2002 showing its strength. Not huge acidity, but what controlled extract, vinosity, and breed. **17.5**

SF: Lively and energetic mousse, youthful and challenging on the nose, then with a delightful poised palate, silky of texture, eloquent of intent, and symphonic in structure. **17**

TS: Intense, citrus and berry fruits; rich, flavorsome. **17**

Vilmart & Cie Premier Cru 2004 (12.5% ABV) - 17

ME: Lime, green-fruit character, mouth-filling, fresh and giving pleasure. **16**

SF: Oaky rich vanillin nose, with hints of verbena, slate, smoke, and baking spice. The palate continues the descent in the same key; made for keeping, and then it will invariably work rather well with, inter alia, a plate of fine de claire oysters. **16.5**

TS: Very rich, high-toned, oak-fermented fruit that needs two or three years to develop creamy richness to overwhelm high-toned character. Vilmart? **18**



Billecart-Salmon Cuvée Elisabeth Salmon Brut Rosé 2002 (12% ABV) - 16.5

ME: Natural salmon hue. Very fresh and incisive, as though there's a good percentage of Chardonnay **16**

SF: Evolved of hue; attractive red-fruit character, nice savory personality. Impressive length and balance. **16**

TS: Easy-drinking, breadly berry fruit. Delicious on its own but with the structure to improve with food. **17**



Dom Pérignon Brut Rosé 2000 (12.5% ABV) - 16.5

ME: Good acidity and race—a rosé that deserves, unusually, another few years to reach its peak. **16.5**

SF: Amber coloring, with a slightly stretched nose; palate lacks generosity of texture and has a slightly disjointed ending. **15**

TS: Soft and sultry but will be even more seductive after a few more years in bottle. **17.5**

Drappier Grande Sèndrée 2004 (12% ABV) - 16.5

ME: A full, rounded style; good ripeness and decent compensating acidity; very respectable. **15.5**

SF: Evolved color; lively spiraling mousse; baked apple, patisserie—a naturally ripe palate petrified in a pleasing tension between its adolescent and its mature self. **16**

TS: Very rich and complex, yet fresh and focused. Classy. **18.5**



Henriot Brut 2005 (12% ABV) - 16.5

ME: This is full and generous, without being clumsy. Evolved Pinot-like flavors; quite seductive—raises the game here. **16**

SF: Slightly smoky nose, with hints of bruised apple and mushroom; pleasing maturity; a little light on the finish. **15**

TS: Classy, toast-infused fruit. Lovely mousse, beautifully balanced acidity. **18.5**

Laurent-Perrier 2004 (12% ABV) - 16.5

ME: A step up here: a complete, harmonious wine, clear, ripe but refreshing, fruity Chardonnay leading. Good weight without heaviness. **16**

SF: Nose still enigmatic, despite having had nearly a decade to decide where to go; citric notes on the palate are married to yellow fruit and hints of spice. The finish is poised and refined, linear and crisp. **16**

TS: Mellow, gentle richness. **17**



Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs 2006 (12% ABV) - 16.5

ME: The sort of 2006 that I like: sprightly acidity in tune with a quite forward note of ripe autolytic development, without going over the top. **16.5**

“The sort of 2006 that I like: sprightly acidity in tune with a quite forward note of ripe autolytic development, without going over the top”—Michael Edwards on Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs 2006

redcurrant; palate has red-fruit charm, a sweetness born of ripeness not merely added sugar, and quite a focused firm finish. **15.5**
TS: Not bad, but too angular and ungainly to have any finesse. **12**

Wiston Estate Cuvée Brut 2008 (12% ABV) - 14.5

ME: More vigor and much more to it than [Nyetimber Classic Cuvée 2008]—young and muscular, will age well. **16**
SF: Lively mousse; citric, gently honeyed nose, with hints of beeswax and verbena. Palate promises much, in an oaky kind of way, but the ensemble is marred by a raw, rather hollow core, which the flattery of oak maquillage fails, in this instance, to deceive. Worth a look in a few years, certainly. **16**
TS: Very high English acids; sweet-and-sour dosage; simple finish. **12**

Salon Blanc de Blancs Le Mesnil 1999 (12% ABV) - 14.5

ME: Some “made” acidity—but where’s the fruit? **14**
SF: Youthful nose of lemongrass and autolysis; palate is quite inscrutable after all these years. **14**
TS: Rich, blossoming fruit, lifted by fine mousse of tiny bubbles. **16**

Francis Boulard Les Rachais Brut Nature 2006 (12% ABV) - 14

ME: Quite a forward, honeyed style; nice attractive fruit but a lack of acidity—the Achilles heel for some in 2006. **15**
SF: Evolved color, then extraordinary rich nose of patisserie, honey, and biscuit. Palate combines coconut, verbena, oily-oak, beeswax, and Seville orange; a symphonic effort, in other words: indulgent and restrained, poised and powerful. **17**
TS: Butterscotch-malo aroma dominating; firm mousse; rich to cloying finish. **10**

Henners Brut 2009 (12% ABV) - 14

ME: A good all-rounder, not especially marked characteristics but all elements that make a good Champagne/sparkling wine in balance and harmony. **16**
SF: Impressive mousse, with stone-fruit notes and hints of white pepper; palate is dominated by citric fruit and is a little tart and raw. **14.5**
TS: Although fresh and tangy, this sparkling wine appears to have gone beyond its phase of freshness and appeal and has not yet arrived at anything more mellow and complex. **12**



Moët & Chandon Brut Rosé 2004 (12.5% ABV) - 14

ME: A medium-weight, nicely balanced rosé, with an evolved vinous character—good for roast pigeon and light game. **16**
SF: Evolved crepuscular coloring, with a nose that marries herbs and spice and strawberry fruit. Palate is approachable, with dried fruit, herbal elegance, and fine balancing acidity. Good with rabbit terrine, or, to be fair, any other terrine. **16**
TS: Toasty-rich fruit of some elegance but let down by unappealing finish that is slightly bitter and lacks finesse. **10**



Philipponnat Cuvée 1522 Premier Cru 2003 (12% ABV) - 14

ME: A broader, more alcoholic wine, but inviting for its expression of ripe fruit in a hot vintage. **15**
SF: Gingerbread, with hints of litchi. The palate is a little manufactured, quite cleverly, but still leaving anxiety as to whether the edifice may crumble at the least opportune moment. **15**
TS: Acids are separating from the fruit, which is itself disappearing, leaving artificially high acids rather naked and dry. **12**

GH Mumm Brut 2006 (12.5% ABV) - 13

ME: Generous, ripe; even a touch of vanilla *au nez*. Brisk and vital, the flavors variegated. Acceptable. **15**
SF: Reticent nose, with a stone-fruit persona and hints of tobacco box. The palate is bigger, sweeter than expected, quite raw

and lacking requisite harmony for its perceived pedigree. **14.5**
TS: Rather rustic orchard fruits; not the best 2006. **10**

GH Mumm Cuvée R Lalou 1999 (12.5% ABV) - 12.5

ME: A better wine, full expressive fruit, lush and generous—*à boire*. **16.5**
SF: Rather oaky and sulky; palate is slightly disjointed, plump without genuine integrity of texture. **14.5**
TS: The barest hint of polythene on the fruit spoils this wine for me, but I’m sure that most people will not even pick it up. **7**

Bruno Paillard NPU 1999 (12% ABV) - 12.5

ME: Some ripe fruity character but hollow in the middle palate and not really worth a vintage label. **14**
SF: Quite hollow and lacking focus and perspective; disappointing. **12**
TS: High-toned. **12**

Philipponnat Rosé Cuvée 1522 Premier Cru 2006 (12% ABV) - 13

ME: Quite candied fruit, the confectioner’s shop. Not really my cup of tea. A sharp note of angular acidity into the bargain. **14**
SF: Copper color, with amber notes; palate is relatively steely for a rosé wine—dry and a shade lugubrious; with time, the corners of the mouth will rise a shade. **14.5**
TS: Lacking fruit and alcohol showing. **10**

Pommery Cuvée Louise 1999 (12.5% ABV) - 13

ME: Some tiring of the fruit here. Needs drinking. **13**
SF: Citric fruit on the nose, a little mute. Palate dried out and rather disjointed. **13.5**
TS: Toasty fruit but lacking any easy accessibility. **13**

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé 2004 (12.5% ABV) - 12.5

ME: A lighter, more salmon hue; quite marked acidity, quite a lean style, lacks a bit of Pinot richness. **14.5**
SF: Gentle rosé hue, with a suitably restrained nose; palate, however, is unnervingly sweet and a little disjointed; lacks resilience and sense of purpose. **13**
TS: I’ve tasted worse at pre-release stage, so this could improve, but as a commercially available product, its chemical nose and less-than-attractive fruit do not do it much justice. **10**



Ridgeview South Ridge 2010 (12% ABV) - 12

ME: White creamy mousse; very ‘10-ish smack of acidity *au nez*, a bit awkward and gawky on palate. From not fully ripe grapes. So-so. **12**
SF: Youthful rather amylic notes, redolent of iodine, jasmine, and slate; then a precocious palate, where the makeup of *dosage* has been applied with only limited success. **12**
TS: High acids, curious peppery fruit, with a citrus finish, sitting on a firm mousse of small but not tiny bubbles, which need a little more bottle aging to soften. An oddball. **12.5**

Veuve Clicquot Brut Rosé 2004 (12% ABV) - 12

ME: A richer, fuller color: more a celebration of ripe little red fruits. Sensuous and appealing. **16**
SF: Uncompromising deep magenta color; nose informed by the carpenters’ art, only nefarious in this instance. The palate does not develop this theme in a constructive manner. **13.5**
TS: A touch of polythene aroma to the toastiness. I really did not like this wine. **7**



Philipponnat Grand Blanc 2005 (12% ABV) - 11.5

ME: Rather a clumsy wine; ripe (almost overripe) fruit and a jarring acidity, illustrative of the problems with 2005. **13**
SF: Slightly oxidative nose, perhaps not completely clean. Palate is a little flat and lackluster, failing to impress. **12**
TS: Lacks fruit, yet has richness. Bitterness on the finish. **10**

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs 2002 (12.5% ABV) - 7

ME: Richer, fuller expression of ‘02; a good ambassador; opulence, with elegance and more to give. **16.5**
SF: Bizarre sulfurous nose; faulty from start to finish. **4**
TS: Diabolical. Mercaptans. Zero score! **0**

SIMON FIELD’S VERDICT

It is hard to extrapolate from such a tasting: first, because youth dictated that the younger releases invariably had to be English, since the Champagne equivalents have yet to be released to the market; and second, because there was uneven representation from the vintages sampled, numerically speaking. Nonetheless, I have a few observations to make.

The English wines generally put in a creditable performance. This may not appear to be immediately obvious from the results, but I was impressed by the overall consistency and especially pleased by both Gusbourne 2008s, by Nyetimber’s Blanc de Blancs 2003, and by the Ridgeview Victoria Rosé 2009.

In the battle of the Champagne vintages, there were seven top ten places for 2004, still in the ascendant in terms of perceived quality. The great 2002 still has a way to go and was not always particularly demonstrative on the day; it is appropriate, however, that Dom Ruinart and Pol Roger were to be its ambassadors during this tasting. The relatively weaker vintages—2006

and 2007—have produced some pleasing and approachable wines, middle-ranking in this lineup, which seems appropriate enough.

As always there were a few disappointments, with Krug 2000, Salon ‘99, Belle Epoque ‘02, and two vintages, surprisingly, of Clos des Goisses all leaving the tasters relatively unmoved. Opinions were more divided on the oaky wines, with creditable performances from the usual suspects, namely Sousa Caudalies, Gratien NV, and Vilmart, with Bollinger RD ‘95 appealing to me more than to my illustrious colleagues. I also liked both wines from Francis Boulard, whom I know less well.

Saving the best to last, credit once again goes to a couple of the big names: Veuve Clicquot and, especially, Charles Heidsieck, the latter a huge tribute to the late Daniel Thibault, Régis Camus, et al. The 2000 Charles was sublime, only pipped in my book by the extraordinary Blanc des Millénaires 1995. An S Field mark of 18.5 corresponds to 20/20 from the more courageous Tom—and that is exactly what it got.

Top wines

Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 1995 18.5	Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs 2008 17
Francis Boulard Extra Brut 2006 17.5	Henriot Brut Cuvée des Enchanteleurs 1998 17
Charles Heidsieck Brut 2000 17.5	André Jacquart Blanc de Blancs 2005 17.5
Palmer & Co Brut 2004 17.5	Veuve Clicquot Brut 2004 17
Joseph Perrier Cuvée Joséphine 2004 17.5	Vve Fourny & Fils Cuvée du Clos Notre Dame du Faubourg Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru Vertus 2002 17
Piper-Heidsieck Brut 2004 17.5	Lanson Noble Cuvée 2000 17
Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame 2004 17.5	Piper-Heidsieck Rare 2002 17
Veuve Clicquot Brut 1990 17.5	Pol Roger Brut 2002 17
Bollinger RD 1995 17	Dom Ruinart Brut Blanc de Blancs 2002 17
Francis Boulard Les Rachais Brut Nature 2006 17	Duval-Leroy Femme de Champagne 2000 17
Alfred Gratien Brut Cuvée Paradis 17	

Late arrivals

Camel Valley Pinot Noir Brut (Cornwall, England) 2010 (12.5% ABV) - 17.5

ME: Snowy white mousse, fine salmon-pink hue; distinctive Pinot Noir aromas, red orchard fruits, generous and expressive. There’s that smack of acidity on the palate—very 2010—that masks the fruit and latent vinosity, but this is a wine of structure and substance that deserves further keeping. **16.5**
TS: This needs another year in bottle to render the mousse silky, but it is so delicious now that I doubt there will be much around when it starts to peak. The exquisite acidity is in perfect harmony with its absolutely gorgeous orchard fruit and perfect *dosage*. **18.5**

Camel Valley Pinot Noir Brut (Cornwall, England) 2009 (12.5% ABV) - 17.5

ME: Tint of color: a blanc de noirs? Gentle flowing bubbles; fresh nose for ripe ‘09, bouncy acidity. Acidity apparent on the palate, though giving energy rather than aggression; flavors of little red fruits, natural and attractive. Medium length. Good. **16**
TS: This is Camel Valley Pinot Noir Brut 2009! I always recognize it, but I am always shocked by how beautifully it drinks. Little things like its very pale, Roederesque color and silky mousse are perfect—no other word does the wine justice. The orchard fruits are so soft, fresh and pure, with the acidity providing vitality. Just sublime! **18.5**

“Palate combines coconut, verbena, oily-oak, beeswax, and Seville orange; a symphonic effort: indulgent and restrained, poised and powerful” — Simon Field on Francis Boulard Les Rachais Brut Nature 2006