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2012 AND 2013 CHAMPAGNE: TWO SHADES OF COOL

Essi Avellan MW compares and contrasts two underappreciated vintages that both have claims to greatness even as the wines remain stylistically different. Simon Field MW and Anthony Rose share a stimulating tasting

In recent years, the Champenois have had to adapt to new climatic conditions and an accelerating frequency of August harvests. Classic cool and tardy vintages have become rare, but the early 2010s offered a succession of them. The 2012 and 2013 vintages managed to come out of their challenging growing seasons as winners. Both harvests wickedly tested the growers' nerves and resilience, earning themselves a reputation as "vine-grower vintages." They provide time warps to the past with their classic, albeit opposing, styles. As the years' most iconic wines are coming to the market, it is time to put the vintages to the test.

The 2012 vintage

In the disastrous first half of 2012, Mother Nature was really testing its growers with what looked like becoming the second catastrophic year in a row. The challenges began in February, when two intense cold spells hit the region. Spring continued cool and wet, showing record downpours since 1994, which put strong mildew pressure on the vines. To add insult to injury, frost hit the vineyards on five occasions, with some 2,900ha (7,200 acres) destroyed. The damages were accentuated by nine episodes of hail.

But all was not lost, even if the climatic roller coaster had managed to cause extreme heterogeneity in the vineyards. Flowering was some six days behind the ten-year average, and the fruit-set remained tricky. But once again, Champagne's famous August miracle came to the rescue, the weather turning glorious by late July,

with the hot and dry spell lasting until the early days of September. The heatwave resulted in a rapid accumulation of sugar, but fortunately the nights remained cool, which helped preserve good levels of acidity. Harvest began between September 10 and 26, the spread in dates reflecting the heterogeneity between areas. But ripeness also varied locally, even within a vineyard, making rigorous harvest planning crucial. It was essential to await the accumulation of aromatics, which stayed unusually low for the ripeness levels, especially for Chardonnay. Excellent sanitary conditions in the vineyards and high malic-acid levels emboldened growers.

Although yields were low (9,210kg/ha) due to frost, hail, and disease early in the season, the 2012 harvest turned out to be exemplary in its maturity, acidity, and health. Average potential alcohol was 10.6% and total acidity 7.8g/l (H₂SO₄). It is widely regarded as a Pinot Noir vintage, though Meunier was also a winner.

The 2013 vintage

The 2013 vintage also began cool and wet. Winter frosts were frequent and snowfalls numerous. The growing season was delayed by some 15 days compared to the ten-year average as both March and April remained cool despite a short hot spell in April. The cool and rainy season gave rise to intense mildew pressure and flowering took place as late as the end of June or even early July. Summer finally arrived in Champagne then, and the following months ended up being spectacularly hot, dry, and sunny. In the ideal conditions

the grapes' sugar content was increasing even too rapidly, risking leaving too short a window for aroma development. The cool and humid early September, however, helped to halt excess sugar accumulation. Along the way, further challenges were given by the weather turning wet toward mid-September, causing significant outbreaks of rot. The long harvest started on September 24 and in some villages as late as October 9. Most of the picking of the abundant yield (12,008kg/ha) took place in cool conditions in October, contributing to a classic cool and linear style of Champagne. The results are varied, but the year favored Chardonnay. For Pinot Noir, the south-facing slopes of the Montagne de Reims proved most successful, the wines displaying a ripe and fleshy character. The conditions on the northern side of the Montagne were more challenging in terms of ripeness and rot pressure. The average potential alcohol of the musts reached 9.8%, and the total acidity remained at 8.5g/l.

Similar but different

Even if the growing seasons had a lot of common features and the wines do not look that dissimilar on paper, stylistically they are wide apart. The 2012s, in all their fruity concentration, are instantly impressive. They were quick to show their textured generosity and well-built structures, even as base wines. Among many of the year's advocates, Louis Roederer's *chef de cave* Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon counts the year among Champagne's greatest, finding a strong resemblance with 1947. One can really taste sunshine in them, but alongside the richness deriving partly from the low yields there is a brisk kick of perfectly integrated acidity, bringing vibrancy to the wines and saving them from heaviness.

Earliest start date	Latest start date
2012: September 10	2012: September 26*
2013: September 24	2013: October 9**

*The official end of the harvest, for each cru, is 28 days after the latest start date of the cru.
**The official end of the harvest, for each cru, is 21 days after the latest start date of the cru.

The 2013s can also, however, seem shy and restrained. They appeared almost unapproachable as *vins clairs*, and even now they are developing painfully slowly in the bottle. But the wines come with classic lean structures, lightness, and mouthwatering raciness. They charm with their elegance and precision. There is density to them, but the wines are notably acid-driven in a similar manner to the 2008s. Looking down at his archive of ripeness figures, Lécaillon also finds a likeness to the 1988 vintage, which has indeed proven its age-worthiness.

The tasting

We tasted a total of 61 wines (of which one was faulty and excluded from the results). We began with 34 wines from 2012, first the whites, then the rosés. We repeated the same exercise for the 2013s, of which we had 26. It was expected that the sample numbers for 2012 would be greater, since the vintage is more widely declared. Also, many more 2012s have so far been released, whereas most prestige bottlings of 2013 are still resting in the cellars.

Disappointingly we only had five pairs of exactly the same cuvée from both years, which makes comparison much more challenging. Still, based on this tiny sample, the verdict was unanimous. Each of us preferred the 2012 in every case. The duo was tightest from Pol Roger, each of us giving exactly one point more to the 2012. The GH Mumm 2012 beat the 2013 by 2.33 points, the margin was 2.67; for Palmer & Co, 3.33; and for Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque, 4.00.

Our opinions varied greatly over the Belle Epoque 2013, but this wine was by no means the only one where our scores spread. This divergence is due mostly to stylistic issues, with tolerance to oxidative characters being the biggest divider of opinion. I have very little tolerance of oxidation, so the range of scores for Drappier's Millésime Exception 2013, for example, was as wide as 13. It was almost as wide for J Lassalle Spécial Club 2012 (12 points), Gosset Grand Millésime 2012 (9), and Ulysse Collin Les Enfers 2013 (9).

We all appreciated, however, the style of Louis Roederer's rosés and all the wines from Palmer & Co. The highest-scoring wines from both vintages are very close. For the 2012s, Cristal Rosé edged ahead of Palmer & Co Vintage (and two other cuvées) by one third of a point, while the 2013 pedestal was shared by Roederer Rosé and Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs.

By all parameters, the 2012 vintage emerges as the winner. The Top Ten includes six 2012s and four 2013s. The average score for 2012 was 91.23; for 2013, 90.08. Anthony Rose and I preferred the 2012s by one point on average, but for Simon the difference was 1.7.

The notion of 2012 being a Pinot Noir vintage and 2013 a Chardonnay year was harder to test. We did, however, have six *blanc de blancs* in the 2013 Top Ten, and only three in the 2012 Top Ten, which may lend some support to the thesis.

The triumph of the 2012s certainly does not mean that 2013 isn't also a great vintage. Consider that Louis Roederer Vintage Rosé 2013 averaged only one point lower than the Cristal Rosé 2012, the overall winner of our tasting. This makes me expect an extraordinary 2013 Cristal Rosé! Bear in mind, too, that 2012 was really only the beginning of a new era for this prestige cuvée, as only since then have all Cristal vineyards been farmed biodynamically (even if not certified so).

The 2013 presents itself as a cool, classy, slow-aging vintage, a style that is becoming endangered in today's climate. When will we see another October harvest? The tight and introverted style is harder to appreciate today than the open and instantly enjoyable 2012s. Moreover, many of the best 2013s are still resting in the cellars. The second quarter of 2021 will witness one moment of truth when the duo of 2013 Cristals are released. But we will need to wait another few years for most of the other iconic prestige cuvées.

The jury is still out, then, regarding the longevity of the two vintages. They will both age extremely well, since all the building blocks of longevity are there, but which one will age better? The compact and reserved 2013 clearly needs more time, and its elegance will probably greatly reward the patient. The 2012 is beautifully here and now, but its great concentration and fine freshness promise longevity as well. For the time being, I would be willing to bet my money on the classically lean and refined 2013.

Overall, I was pleased with the great performance of many of the grower Champagnes on show here. Our Top Ten included Larmandier-Bernier Les Chemins d'Avize 2013 and De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Avize 2012, in eighth and ninth position respectively. My own top grower Champagne was outside the overall Top Ten: J Lassalle Spécial Club 2012. I also rated the Ulysse Collin 2013 Chardonnays Les Enfers and Les Pierrières very highly.

What both of these vintages surely have in common, at least for now, is underappreciation. There hasn't been much enthusiasm for 2013 so far, and even the more recognized 2012 is left in the shadow of the unprecedentedly hyped 2008. I gave some top marks in this tasting to Champagnes that are "mere" Vintage wines, not even prestige cuvées—which allows me to look forward with excitement to the treats still in store. ■

ESSI AVELLAN MW'S TOP WINES

Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé 2012	97
Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2012	96
Palmer & Co Brut 2012	95
Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs Brut [2013]	95
Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012	95
Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 2012	94
Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Extra Brut 2012	94
GH Mumm Brut 2012	94
Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé Brut 2012	94
Pol Roger Brut 2013	94
J Lassalle Special Club Premier Cru Brut 2012	94
Louis Roederer Rosé 2013	93
Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012	93
Ulysse Collin Les Enfers Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV [2013]	93
Ulysse Collin Les Pierrières Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV [2013]	93
Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2013	93

AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	91	82-97
EA	91	83-97
SF	89	82-94
AR	92	88-97

Charles Heidsieck Millésime Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 94

EA | Deep gold. Stunning, fragrantly toasty, come-hither nose. Roasted coffee beans, dried apricots, vanilla, and crème brûlée. Delicious and ever-changing melange. Super-sweet fruit on the creamy-silky palate. Impressively intense and clean. Really long and super-fruity palate, with fine freshness. | 96

SF | Pleasing soft gold color, hints of buckwheat and straw; the mousse draws quickly; nose of lemongrass, strawberry, and fig, with a hint of almond essence and soft plum juice behind; pleasingly savory and with a suggestion of jambon cru and wild strawberry, this is a very accomplished and pleasingly enigmatic piece of work. | 91

AR | Pale gold in color, this fizz displays an attractive balanced aroma of fruit and light toastiness, and this follows through on the tongue with an expansive, mouth-filling mousse whose fruit flavors are supported by a nutty-lees-aged, toasty complexity in a fizz that's really well balanced and refreshingly bone-dry. | 94

Palmer & Co Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 94

EA | Medium-lemon color. Sophisticated nose, with creamy-toasty complexity. Rich and expressive, with lovely gunpowdery whiffs. Round palate, emphasizing the dried-fruit profile. There is volume and freshness on the sweetly fruity, instantly impressive palate. Long finish. | 95

SF | Attractive, soft gold color; gentle mousse; nose of briary, plum, hazelnut, and quince; and enhances the promise hitherto demonstrated; the red fruit now more vibrant, the citric elements clearer of definition, slate and flint on the finish; peat and forest floor; all most satisfying! | 92

AR | Pale gold, this has that intriguing beer-yeasty, sourdough nose, suggesting beneficial lees-aged development; and it follows through on the palate, which shows an intense ripe fruitiness bisected by a trenchant fresh acidity in a delicate and complex fine mousse that dissolves, with tangy, Cox's apple bite, into a finely balanced, long, dry finish. | 94

Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé 2012 (12% ABV) | 94

EA | Radiant peachy color. Understatedly elegant nose, with cool restraint. Pristine fruit with smoky touches. Peach, Golden Delicious apple, yuzu, strawberry, and marshmallows. Really harmonious and seductive on the plush, silky smooth palate. Such drinkability, easiness, and purity. Youthful still, and will take time. | 97

SF | Soft onion-skin color, a bronze hue; incredible nose of citric fruit, red berries, and a hint of caramel; the palate maintains and enhances this great potential; savory, lifted, salty, even a touch gamey; an archetype of a developed and supremely challenging rose; welcome in itself, but in this instance, more so, its potential resounding within a persuasive inner tension. | 94

AR | Mid-bronze color, this shows vivid, berry-like aromas and a hint of lees-aged complexity; on the palate, its bright and vivid cranberryish flavors taper to an elegantly dry finish. | 91

Ayala Le Blanc de Blancs Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | 93

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Lovely purity to the fruit, which has cotton-candy and vanilla sweetness lingering around the lemon and white-fruit richness. Fine delicacy to the fruit and such a subtle toasty nuance. The palate shows some evolution, being really seductively creamy and mellow but refreshed by the exemplary acid line. Long, pure, and brightly fruity finish. | 92

SF | Soft pewter on bed of nacreous indulgence; a gloriously inviting nose of praline, spice, and malt loaf; the palate is symphonic, generous of dosage for sure, but making up for it with a purity of fruit (melon, plum, and strawberry come to mind) and an impressive citric grip which forewarns of a sensuous evolution. | 91

AR | Pale with green glints, this is an accomplished fizz which sets out with an instantly appealing aromatic complexity to it, light lees notes combining with an appealing cashew-like nuttiness, while the texture is delicate and energetically effervescent, coating the tongue with an intensity of light toast and stone-fruit flavors, all supported by finely balanced, juicy refreshing acidity. | 95

Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs Brut [2013] (12% ABV) | 93

EA | Bright lemon color. Stunningly toasty and charmingly sweetly fruity nose. Such complexity and finesse. On the palate, it is polished and creamy, with licorice and vanilla layers. Long taste in perfect harmony. Succulently fruity, with some evolution but youthful still. | 95

SF | As is often the case, a modest color belies a wonderfully expressive nose; the small but persistent mousse offers a clue, but, even so, the olfactory surprise is impressive; figs, nougat, plum, and honeydew melon. Votive and richly indulgent, hints of linseed and even coconut oil also evidenced. The pleasure principle is in no way forsaken by a palate that combines the rich, indulgent promise of the nose, with oaky grip and impressive concentration of fruit. If the charm is somewhat ethereal, dissipating promptly, this in no way undermines the glimpses of wealth thereby carefully restored in the memory. | 90

AR | Pale lemon, with greeny glints, this is expressive and complex in its aromatic power, showing its lees-aged autolysis with an almost struck-match note of high toastiness, in Puligny-Montrachet vein, and that follows through in the mouth with an expansively rich, mouth-filling mousse, underpinned by leesy, matchstick notes, tapering to a dry finish spiced with lemony freshness. | 94

Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 93

EA | Glossy lemon color. Fine, fruity nose with lovely gunpowder and vanilla whiffs. Subtle and polished but comes with complexity. Richer and more pronounced on the palate. Concentrated, with loads of delicious fruit. A big, bold style but successfully so. Plenty of expression already but will improve. | 94

SF | Lifted and lively, a little SO₂ for good measure, banana and plum skin, chocolate and verbena;

phenolic and rich, a gem awaiting discovery; powerful and assertive; citrus and red fruits happily ensconced here in a virtuous cycle of pleasure. | 92

AR | Mid-gold in color, this is attractively berry-like and vivid in aroma, with a satisfyingly dry foaming mousse that spreads evenly across the tongue with its berry-fruit flavors enveloped in a marshmallow softness of texture, and turns into a salty, blackberry-like, dry bite on the finish. | 92

Louis Roederer Rosé 2013 (12% ABV) | 93

EA | Pretty, pale salmon color. The elegantly cool and restrained fruitiness is inviting. Crunchy red fruit with a twist of toast. The acidity on the round and fleshy palate is invigorating. Really good energy, leading to a pristinely fruity, long, sweet finish. | 93

SF | Coppery amber; small bubbles; an attractive nose of wild strawberry, fig, and plum, citric, chalky restraint not too far behind... An attractive hedgerow note, phenolics evidenced and a little awkward with the dosage; overall, however, an impressive symphonic structure and one that is sure to grow in stature over the medium term. | 92

AR | A light coppery pink in color, this is a well-made, delicate rosé Champagne that combines fresh, mouth-filling raspberry fruit, with light toasty notes on the palate, in a medium-weight, vinous fizz with fine, tangy cranberryish bite and grip on the finish; will serve double duty, as an apéritif but also as a food wine to go with the likes of lobster. | 94

Drappier Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 92

EA | Glossy lemon color. Stylish, evolving nose, with nuanced fruit. A little pastry, brown butter, Golden Delicious apple, and baking spices. Plush, voluptuous palate, with age-mellowed creaminess. Concentrated, with a long-lasting, sweetly fruity finish. In a lovely drinking age but no hurry. | 90

SF | Bright, clean, luminous yet pale at the rim; attractive, all in all; nose of flowers and spice, the gentle fizz nonetheless persistent and powerful; citric lemongrass and hints of toffee, nectarine and acacia; well judged, with a most pleasing persistence. | 89

AR | Pale gold in color, this is intriguingly rich and complex, yet still remarkably fresh and at the same time savory in aroma, one that gets the saliva juices flowing; on the palate, its freshness is in no way compromised, thanks to a bright, vivacious acidity, and at the same time the intensity of fruit and complexity shines through, etched with that bright acidity but supported and balanced by toasty, lees-aged development, in such a way that while it's more than ready to drink now, it has a decade or longer of aging potential. | 96

Larmandier-Bernier Les Chemins d'Avize Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra-Brut 2013 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Richly colored hue. A characterful nose, with interesting yeasty tones, floral whiffs,

and yellow-apple and mirabelle plum fruit. Spicy, woody complexity. Really structured and vinous on the palate, showing some age already. Fine transparency, but it would be enhanced by even greater elegance. | 91

SF | Generous color here; sandy, hints of ochre; an assertive, slightly stentorian nose of honeydew melon, fig, and elderflower, rhubarb and griotte; unresolved, hitherto, oak at the prow. The palate brings into play caramel and preserved salted lemon; camphor, cumin, and late-season apples, more exotic notes behind that; guava, pineapple, and mango. Encyclopedic in aspiration, and well on the way to justifying its intent; youthful ambition will blossom for sure. | 92

AR | Pale golden hue, this is rich in aromatic energy, with notes of popcorn and butterscotch, suggesting a proportion of barrel fermentation. While on the palate, the texture is rich with underlying buttery notes framed by an almost surprisingly soft acidity, thanks to an evolution that suggests drinking over the next three to five years. | 94

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Extra Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Gorgeously toasty nose, with roasted coffee beans, hay, fireworks, and vanilla. Really pristine yet ripe fruit, with a reductive profile. Balanced palate, with intense yet soft fruitiness, creamy texture, and fine freshness. Easy to drink and appealing. Shows some mellowing but very youthful still. | 94

SF | Soft silvery luster; luminosity, with an attractive mousse; ludicrous in its best sense. Plum skin, hints of verbena and bracken, and then a subtlety of impressive, salty macadamia. The palate is still very youthful, with a spicy, almost vinous appeal; quinine and almond essence and a playful, still youthful, sweetly joyful mid-palate. | 91

AR | Pale-lemon hue, with greeny glints to it; pleasantly aromatic, some struck-match, leesy notes, attractive stone-fruit flavors, more on the fruity than the complex side, with a nice juiciness of texture, a degree of complexity, and good, tangy, dry finish. | 90

GH Mumm Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Pale-lemon color. A super-refined nose of gently toast-complexed fruit; whiffs of fruit drops, vanilla, and toffee over pristinely ripe fruitiness. Lovely soft volume to the palate, of the smoothest mousse. Creamy and intense, with a long carry. Starting to drink very well, with expression. | 94

SF | Subtle nose, yet with a lively mousse; tobacco leaf, pineapples, quince, and a hint of verbena; chalk without dust; power without depth; a well-rehearsed piece, feeding from the benevolence of the vintage, and assuredly with much to deliver down the track, although it promises much already! | 90

AR | Lemony in color, this is attractively fresh, with an alluring, bright, fruit quality on the nose and a degree of complexity, while the palate is bright and vibrantly fruit, quite winy in a way, too; overall, well-balanced and mouthwateringly bone-dry on the finish. | 92

SIMON FIELD MW'S VERDICT

An enticing juxtaposition, this, with the balance narrowly favoring 2012 in terms of submissions (58% v 42%) but, in my analysis at least, hugely favoring the older vintage in terms of appreciation. After all the sound and fury about 2008 versus 2002, with the former, more chiseled vintage probably now in the ascendant, herewith another contender for greatness. What will come to rival 2012? 2015 maybe, or, with time, at least one of the highly promising trinity of '18, '19 and '20... Let's wait and see.

But not, in all likelihood, 2013, a famously late and reticent vintage. Some delightful '13s were on display here, for sure, but few really stood out. Indeed, of the 11 wines I scored at 92 points or above, only one (Louis Roederer Rosé 2013) was from the younger vintage. A good day, all in all, for the house of Roederer, M Lecaillon's march toward perfection continuing apace, more and more tinged by organic aspiration (and certified recognition).

Anyway, some lovely wines here, certainly, my lack of super-high marks reflecting more the fact that these wines are still very youthful and will, over time, give more—and gain even more. Terrific to see plaudits across the board,

TOP WINES

Louis Roederer Cristal Rosé 2012 94

De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Avize Les Pierres Vaudons Extra Brut 2012 93

Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2012 93

Palmer & Co Brut 2012 92

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé Brut 2012 92

Louis Roederer Cristal Brut 2012 92

Louis Roederer Rosé 2013 92

Larmandier-Bernier Les Chemins d'Avize Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra-Brut 2013 92

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Rosé Extra Brut 2012 92

Marie-Courtin Eloquence Blanc de Blancs Chardonnay Extra-Brut 2012 92

Maily Grand Cru Brut L'Intemporelle 2012 92

Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 91

with co-ops (Maily and Palmer) holding their own against fashionable growers (Larmandier-Bernier and De Sousa) and of course the great houses, Gosset and Perrier-Jouët, joining Louis Roederer *summa cum laude*. Indeed, it may be surmised that the difference between the Belle Epoque somewhat underlines the polarity of this tasting, with 2012 overall so much more concentrated and inspiring than 2013.

The only caveat, if indeed it is a caveat, is that some of these wines are almost overwhelming in their generosity. The bizarre meteorological conditions of 2012 (hail, frost, rain, and so on in the early part of the season) served to concentrate the crop that remained, yielding ripe, small berries and powerful, assertive wines. Often during the tasting I discerned sugar in wines that turned out to have had little, if any, added. The ripeness was all, and was, in general, well managed and in no way detrimental to the shape of the wines or their structural harmony. But if this pattern continues, and if the harvests get earlier and earlier, we really might be burdened with the paradox of "too much of a good thing." In 2012, however, and happily, let's agree to settle on the good thing.

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Extra Brut 2012 91

Ayala Le Blanc de Blancs Brut 2013 91

Henriot Rosé Brut 2012 91

J Lassalle Special Club Premier Cru Rosé Brut 2013 91

Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs 2013 91

Pierre Gimonet & Fils 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Oenophile Brut Nature Non Dosé 2012 91

Larmandier-Bernier Terre de Vertus Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature Non Dosé 2012 91

Louis Roederer Rosé Brut Nature 2012 91

Leclerc Briant Blanc de Blancs Grand Blanc Brut Zéro 2013 91

Maily Exception Blanche Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 91

De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Le Mesnil Les Chetillons Extra Brut 2012 91

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Bright lemon color. Pristinely fruity nose, with a subtle toasty expression to it. Crisp and crunchy, but still perfectly ripe fruit. Peaches, yellow apple, pear, vanilla, and mirabelle plums. Highly polished, with the creamiest mousse to it. Carelessly textured and attractive, with a long, super-fruity finish. Youthful still but starting to give a full expression of itself. | 96

SF | Pewter gold; a nose of lemongrass, straw, and spring flowers, the future underwritten by honeyed potential; honey, lemon, plum, and verbena; an elegiac, attractive nose and palate,

long and eloquent, pleasingly resourceful. Stone-fruit potential. | 89

AR | Pale gold in color, there's a note of plum and light toast on the nose, while on the palate, a ripe stone-fruit purity is cut by a lively fresh bite of trenchantly fresh acidity in a very well-balanced blend combining both fresh fruit purity with a degree of nutty complexity and trenchant bite on the finish, making for an attractively vinous Champagne. | 92

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Pale peachy color. Attractively fruity yet

elegant nose with sweet peach, candy, and burned-sugar notes. Lots of ripe fruit there, compacted and generous. The freshness is still there, complemented by the perfect creaminess of the mousse. Juicy and mouthwateringly zingy. Drinking very well already but will take time very well. | 94

SF | Gentle citric verbena color; subtle, savory evolution; jambon cru, strawberry, and lemongrass; soft phenols and a seductive creamy palate; the finish is vinous yet poised, elegant of construction and with an unfathomably resonant ethereal lift on the finish. | 92

AR | A delicate pale bronze in color, this is fresh and fruity in aroma, that fruitiness following through onto the palate is a juicy, berry-like fruitiness that finishes on a cleansing dry note. | 89

Pol Roger Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | First bottle: TCA. Second bottle pristinely fruity. Very youthful, with creamy-complexed, subtly toasty fruit and a whiff of gunpowder. Lemon, peach, yellow plums, and white flowers. The palate is round and generous, softly bubbling, with a salty, mineral tang to it. Superbly clean fruit and sweet, appealing, and polished finish. Lovely radiance of fruit. | 95

SF | Dreamy, hazy, pleasing, milky color and aromatic, with pineapple, mandarin, and well-integrated yeast to the fore; white peach, cumin, and verbena thereafter; the palate rehearses and then accentuates the best of these notes; mandarin and spice, soft pepper and quasi-exotic plush; a saucerful of secrets, indulgently entwined, but with great care. | 91

AR | Pale lemony green in color, this is pleasingly fresh in aroma, with light underlying hints of nuttiness and a degree of lees-aged complexity which follows through on the palate in a nicely balanced fizz that's refreshingly tangy, with a cleansing, dry finish. | 91

Eric Rodez La Pierre aux Larrons Ambonnay Grand Cru Brut Chardonnay 2013 (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Medium-deep lemon color, with some evolution. Soft, yeast-complexed nose, with charred tones. Spicy, appley fruit. Tart palate, with expansive, slightly coarse mousse. A richly fruity, generous, evolved style. | 90

SF | Straw-yellow, bright but modest of hue; a gentle mousse and nose of soft oak, cashew and orange blossom; an attractive palate marked by the juxtaposition of notes of mirabelle plum, summer flowers, soft spice, and hints of tangerine. Oak tightens the palate, its full expression hitherto denied, save for the agreeable citric and peachy notes, themselves bolstered by more exotic nuance of tangerine and pistachio. An impressive piece of work; even if one has only. Theseus-like, started to unthread the message. | 90

AR | Pale gold in color, this has immediate aromatic appeal, showing sweet praline and light toasty notes, an apparent oak hint, too, followed in the mouth by a full-flavored yet delicate mousse of fine bubbles delivering lovely, toasty, nut and butterscotch flavors, supported by well-balanced acidity that tapers to an appetizing, dry finish. Classic Chardonnay-driven blanc de blancs. | 95

De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Avez Les Pierres Vaudons 2012 Extra Brut (12.5% ABV) | 92

EA | Medium-deep lemon. Ripe and powerful appley nose, with some oxidative evolution and plenty of yeast impact. Big, bold palate, with chunky fruit and plenty of acidity. Turbo-boosted. Long, powerful, winey finish. | 89

SF | Golden hue, small neat bubbles, finely calibrated; reduction blows off quickly, then there are discernible notes of quince, lanolin, and yellow peach, ripe and expressive. This encouraging prelude carries effortlessly to the palate, where soft honey, vanillin pod, and hints of praline kick in; balanced acidity, incredible power, yet with perfectly nuanced phenolic grip and a swathe of all-encompassing acidity; all in all, a terrific endorsement of the discreet power of this most wonderfully complicated vintage. | 93

AR | Rich mid-gold, alluring ripe apricot and sweet nutty aromas; a richly flavored, finely textured mousse of persistent bubbles, delivering fine stone-fruit and light toasty flavors to the tongue, along with a serious vinosity that brings grip to a tangy-fresh, very well-balanced fizz that would work as an aperitif but go equally well with white-fish dishes; a fizz whose energy and freshness should carry this through another decade. | 95

Delamotte Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Bright lemon-green color. Fine, evolving complexity to the nose. Pristine white-fruit profile, with pear, pineapple, and peach complemented by lemon and lime. Less complexity to the palate, but fine, zingy, crunchy fruit. Long and sweetly fruity, succulent finish. Still youthful, with plenty of fruity appeal. | 93

SF | Soft straw-gold color; small, almost ineffably discreet bubbles; nose of nectarine, lemongrass, and a hint of white chocolate; the palate is immediately attractive, citric fruit parrying with more exotic elements; spruce and even a hint of licorice. Thereafter the prose resumes: figs, sloes, and a hint of diacetyl... This one is nice enough but maybe promises more than it delivers. | 89

AR | Pale lemon with green glints; a hint of honeycomb on the nose; quite rich and ripe on the mid-palate, with a nice tanginess of crisp acidity and a grip on the finish that needs food. | 90

Deutz Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Medium-lemon color. Nuanced nose, with prominently appley and spicy characters; also dried apricots, honey, and earthy notes. Vinous, ripely fruity, concentrated palate. Structured and oily smooth, with long, firm, yet fruity finish. Nicely structured and monumental but could do with a little more finesse. | 92

SF | Softer color, dawn after the mist has risen; a fine mousse and a distinctive aromatic of pine nut, verbena and mirabelle plum. Thereafter the palate opens up indulgently, and one wonders if the sugar added may have compromised the promise previously demonstrated; a very agreeable wine for all that! | 89

AR | Pale gold in color, the nose is fresh, alluring,

and complex, with ripe stone fruit dominating, leading to an attractively rich foaming mousse of persistent bubbles that deliver ripe peachy fruit in abundance and a light complexing veneer of toastiness, adding delicacy to a finely judged, savory blend that finishes on a mouthwateringly tangy, dry note. | 93

Pierre Gimonnet & Fils 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Oenophile Brut Nature Non Dosé 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 91

EA | Glossy lemon color. Expressive nose showing some evolution. Yellow apple, lemon, peach, orange blossom, and hazelnuts. There was more softness and appeal to the nose, whereas the palate is very dry, showing some contrast. Still fine plushness of fruit and generosity, with balanced but sufficient acidity. | 91

SF | Precise nose of verbena, flint, and nectarine; the color is modest, the bead tightly wound. Great persistence on the palate, yet with a lacy filigree delicacy and a power unusual in a blanc de blancs, its phenolic subtext naggingly persuasive. | 91

AR | Pale golden hue, showing a degree of popcorn and nutty evolution in its aroma, with a light brioche note; nicely balanced, ripe stone-fruit mousse, supported by a lively, bright acidity, tapering toward a clean, dry finish. | 91

Pierre Gimonnet & Fils Special Club Grands Terroirs de Chardonnay Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 91

EA | Evolving lemon color. Smoke-completed nose with earthy tones over intense fruit. There is an element of dust to it. Powerful and concentrated but it comes with a lovely vivacity. Shows evolution already but no hurry. | 90

SF | Lime-gold color; an excitable mousse and an equally seductive aromatic of citric fruit, pineapple, sea-salt, and lemongrass; nice tension on the mid-palate, all the indulgent potential of the vintage held in sway by rigor and an undeniable self-belief. | 90

AR | Pale gold, this is fresh and attractively sweet in aroma, with hints of honey and biscuit, while the Chardonnay fruit on the palate is delicately spread across the tongue by a finely textured mousse that carries delicate fruit flavors, light toast, and that sweet honeyed note with it, leading to a well-balanced, dry finish. | 92

Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Lemony color. Really buttery nose, with toffee and vanilla taking over the fruit. So buttery on the vinous palate, too; rather too much. | 86

SF | Generous Welsh gold color; a lively mousse, keen to please; delicious nose of vanillin, pineapple, lemon posset, and irrefutable potential. The palate does not undermine such optimism; it accentuates it, for sure, maybe at a pace, so that the more flamboyant strawberry and plush notes enter the descant a little nervous of those who may be required to support their eloquent peroration. | 93

AR | Pale gold in color, this shows fine complexity of fruit and lees-aged, honeycomb nuttiness on

the nose, which follows through on the palate with a finely judged purity of fruit supported by serious, complexing light toasty notes, all finely balanced and tantalisingly complex, finishing on a mouth-wateringly dry note. | 95

Henriot Rosé Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Deep salmon color. Rich Pinot nose with pencil shavings, licorice, and pepper, alongside cherry and strawberry fruit. Interesting character. A lot on the palate, but not heavy. Gastronomic style. Ready to drink but can keep. | 92

SF | Attractive nose; russet, fox fur, amber plus; then a nose to die for, the wildest strawberry and lemongrass; citronella, plush, blackcurrant leaf and a hint of verbena; strawberry fool on the palate, balanced acidity and sugar, and plenty of seductive red-fruit charm. | 91

AR | A deepish coppery bronze in color, this is invitingly fresh and aromatic, with a fine cushion of berryish bubbles expansively spreading across the tongue with juicy raspberry fruit flavors that deliver a satisfyingly tangy, fresh and fruity yet ultimately dry and sophisticated fizz. | 91

Larmandier-Bernier Terre de Vertus Premier Cru Non Dosé Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 91

EA | Deep color. Powerful nose full of rich fruit, with spicy and buttery complexity. Generous, vinous palate, with an expansive mousse. Licorice comes across notably in the aromatics. Intense palate, which has sweet fruit and a long, winey finish. | 90

SF | Flaxen straw, with a lively mousse, and pleasing aromatics of plum, raisin, peach, and brioche; grippy oaky indulgence, measured dosage, and a reassuring finish, touched by intriguing notes of orange essence and juniper, square-sailed and flowing seamlessly. | 91

AR | Pale lemon to gold in color, an attractive note of sweet digestive biscuit and caramel wafer; fine, richly flavored mousse of delicate bubbles, carrying leesy-nutty and ripe peachy flavors across the tongue toward an expressive, dry finish. | 93

J Lassalle Special Club Rosé Brut Premier Cru Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Pale salmon color. Seductively fruity nose with sweet strawberry, cranberry, and raspberry fruit. Lovely gentle charred toastiness surfaces underneath. Toastiness is stronger on the soft, pleasurable palate. Appealing sweetness of fruit and mouth-watering juiciness. Pure pleasure—easygoing but not simple. | 92

SF | Onion-skin color, a playful and persistent mousse; the nose is equally attractive; rosehip, spruce, fig, and nectarine; finely judged palate; sugar, red fruit, developed spices (nutmeg comes to mind), and a hint of the savory; jambon cru behind the crushed raspberry; white pepper and stone fruit. Creamy and approachable, in no way overly indulged; pleasant now. | 91

AR | Pale coppery pink in color, this smells sweetly strawberryish, and follows through on the palate

with an appealing sweetish berry-like fruit flavor and fine texture, supported by good, fresh cranberry-like bite, the acidity bringing balance and a nice dry feel to the finish. | 90

Leclerc Briant Blanc de Blancs Grand Blanc Brut Zero 2013 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Glossy medium-deep lemon color. Rich, expressive nose with a slight lift to it. Some autumnal, buttery and appley tones. Moderate toasty undertones. Rich, generous palate, with an expansive mousse. Very dry finish, cutting off some of the length. A touch oxidative, which brings rusticity. | 88

SF | Straw-bright, lively mousse; linseed, slightly sappy nose; quince and a hint of bracken; the palate is full, firm, and positive; verbena and spring flowers, sourdough and a hint of brioche; full-figured without flabbiness, joyful of the rites of youthful, gently oaked indulgence. | 91

AR | Pale golden hue, expressively rich aromas combining notes of farm butter and light toast with a degree of nuttiness, very inviting; delicately textured mousse, with a Chardonnayish butteriness and fine, incisive blade of acidity for a satisfying dry finish. | 94

AR Lenoble Chouilly Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. There is lovely subtleness to the ripe fruity nose. Floral with vanilla, fruit drops, and even tropical fruit. Voluptuous, soft palate, with a creamy mousse and balanced acidity. Medium-long, juicy, delicious palate. Still youthful. | 92

SF | Soft gold; a very playful mousse, slow to dissipate; then a most attractive nose of autumn leaves, spice, apples, and just a hint of jasmine; the leitmotif of leafy indulgence translates well onto the palate, which has on the one hand a gently creamy, seductive indulgence, but on the other an impressive grip, acidity, and phenols, fruit and autolytic evolution all kept pleasingly in synch. | 90

AR | Pale lemon with greeny glints; a fresh, solids / nutty aromatic quality; finely textured mousse of juicy ripe bubbles, very user-friendly in its flavors and textures with attractively balancing acidity and a nicely dry finish. | 91

Marie-Courtin Eloquence Blanc de Blancs Chardonnay Extra-Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Deep golden color. A really expressive nose—jumps at you. Rich, impressive toastiness and heaps of ripe, intense fruit underneath. Shows charred evolution. The palate is less exciting, with vinosity taking over. Long, powerful finish. Blockbuster style. | 89

SF | Impressive Welsh gold color, fine bubbles; the nose is more savory than oxidized; *sous-bois*, dried fruit, peat, and ripe pineapple to the fore; here we have concentration and ripeness rather than oxidation, one surmises. The palate confirms the optimistic thesis; vanillin and plum, architectural power and a lovely poised finish. | 92

AR | Pale gold, this has an immediately attractive

aromatic character, with sweet butterscotch and cashew notes, and a light savory edge to it, while the palate delivers a fine-textured mousse of ripe fruit and light, lees-aged, nutty flavors, finishing elegantly dry. | 93

Maily Exception Blanche Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. An evolving nose, with sweet, toffee-laden fruit. Vanilla, apple, and honey. Some oxidative tones. Sweet, powerful palate, with a creamy mousse and soft, vinous finish. | 88

SF | Straw gold, heavy on the latter in its Byzantium indulgence; a vinous indolence when it comes to the mousse; hazelnuts and winter jasmine (should such a thing exist); cashmere-plush, but not oxidized, not yet anyway; late-season windfall, Siegfried Sassoon elegiac, something profound yet unstated. Oh, for a little more fizz here! | 91

AR | Pale gold in color, this draws you in from the start with expressive aromatic power and complexity, displaying a combination of dried stone-fruit intensity and biscuit and brioche on the nose, following through to a finely balanced, textured mousse, which shows equal elements of stone-fruit flavor and leesy complexity, all finishing with its bright fresh acidity on a satisfyingly cleansing dry note. | 94

Maily Grand Cru Brut L'Intemporelle 2012 (12% ABV) | 91

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Rather singular appley fruit, with a lift to it. More attractive on the round, bold palate. A little obvious, with a sweet expression. | 89

SF | Gentle gold-straw color; a nose of vanillin, quince, and red apples; lovely, rich, expressive palate, which sings raspberry, plum, and the Song of Songs; an eloquent, resonant wine, for all that, articulate yet pure, red and citric fruit harmoniously entwined, with plenty of potential thereafter. | 92

AR | Mid-gold; the aromas are a tad subdued but there's some evident subtle complexity in a degree of lightly toasty, lees-aged development, while there's a distinct tang on the tongue, with each and every bubble, in a youthful, almost elemental fizz which combines fruit with both grip and a slightly austere touch of salty dryness on the finish. | 93

Moët & Chandon Grand Vintage Rosé Extra Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 91

EA | Deep cherry-hued color. Expressive, bold, Pinot nose, with complexing spiciness. Rich and chunky on the palate, which comes with a slightly coarse mousse. Not hugely complex, but big character presented here. A touch of phenolics at the finish. Drinks very well but can take further time. | 91

SF | Incredible, dense amber-russet; the nose of fireworks, incense, crushed raspberry, and verbena is entirely unresolved but wonderfully intriguing; peat, dried fruit, essence of raspberry, and a umami subplot that defies early interpretation. A *suivre*. | 92

AR | A deepish coppery pink in color, there's lots of strawberry-fruit aromas inviting into a Champagne in which berry fruitiness dominates as the bubbles exploding onto the tongue deliver strawberries and cream, cut by a crisp, refreshingly dry acidity. | **91**

Philipponnat 1522 Grand Cru Extra Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | **91**

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Soft, appley nose, with pastry-shop nuances. Apple pie, ginger, and vanilla. Plush, rich, yet energetic palate. Remains slightly singular, with an edge of rusticity. Medium-long, juicy finish. | **89**

SF | Attractive, yellow-straw color, and a nose of macadamia, quince, and Braeburn apples; the palate opens out indulgently; fig, lemongrass, and almond essence; agreeable if not profound, inherent ripeness somewhat at odds with what appears to be a reasonably generous dosage, despite its extra-brut qualifications. Appealing over the medium term. | **89**

AR | Pale gold in color, the nose is subtly restrained, showing a degree of biscuity complexity, a hint of prune, and clove spice, but still elementally youthful; in the mouth, there's an expansive, mouth-filling mousse that carries a fine, toasty, rich complexity, and intense, ripe stone-fruit quality, all finely balanced and tapering gradually towards a finishing line of deeply satisfying, cleansing fresh fruit. | **95**

Pol Roger Brut 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **91**

EA | Bright lemony color. Inviting purely and brightly fruity nose. Ripe peach, lemon, and cotton-candy nose, with pastry complexity. Softly evolving but keeping very fruity. Rich, textured palate, with a fine, creamy mousse. Lots of attractive fruit on the fresh palate of refreshing vivacity. | **94**

SF | Straw color, a hint of tobacco leaf. A civilized nose of orchard fruit, nectarine, and honeydew; a hint of cinnamon and soft spice, too; the palate is broad and generous, dosage seemingly quite high, but a pleasing counterpoint of fruit and autolytic development. The grip of youth, tension on a bed of fruit and pashmina; more to come, assuredly. | **90**

AR | Pale to mid-gold in color, this is lightly herbal on the nose and quite shy, with a pleasing mousse of bubbles that's quite stone-fruit in flavour, and while subtle, there is some underlying complexity from lees aging, which may need further time to really show itself, as it's perfectly well balanced, if not especially expressive now. | **90**

Louis Roederer Brut Nature Rosé 2012 (12% ABV) | **91**

EA | Peachy color. Soft, ripe, fruity nose, with sweet strawberry and peach fruit. A touch of spicy complexity and undergrowth evolution. Fresh, with accentuated acidity on the round, generous palate. Long, suitably dry finish. The subtlest touch of oxidation dulls the fruit. Bottles 1 and 2 both similar. | **90**

SF | Expressive onion-skin color; an equally expressive aromatic of bilberry, tobacco leaf, and a hint of thyme; rich, resinous, elegant,

ANTHONY ROSE'S VERDICT

My average mark for the 2012 vintage was higher than for 2013, and yet both vintages in this blind tasting threw up a number of excellent examples of their type. Suffice it to say that 2012 was generally more consistent among the blanc de blancs styles, where generosity of ripe Chardonnay fruit combined with fine natural acidity and lengthy lees aging to produce many superb examples of the style.

Given that we tasted around 30 wines from each year, this was a first look, a snapshot of the two consecutive vintages at a point in time, rather than a definitive result. The most youthful, more structured wines will after all benefit from further time. Apart from the fact that the usual suspects [Dom Pérignon, Krug, Seloche, and Salon] could not submit their wines, notable absentees included Bollinger, Bruno Paillard, Laurent-Perrier, Piper-Heidsieck, Ruinat, Taittinger, and La Grande Dame.

A good number of growers was represented (a voluminous five in the case of Ulysse Colin)

and many showed extremely well. Comparisons are odious, but while Ayala, Charles Heidsieck, Deutz, Drappier, Gosset, Philipponnat, and Thiénot put in strong performances, so did many growers, in particular Leclerc Briant, Larmandier-Bernier, Eric Rodez, Doyard, De Sousa, Gimonnet, and, with its blanc de blancs, Ulysse Colin.

There were too few rosés to make any kind of general statement, but all were high-quality, especially the Deutz and Roederer from 2013, where, from a smaller sampling admittedly, my average marks were actually slightly higher than those from the 2012 vintage. I was a little disappointed to have given the equivalent of silver rather than gold to Roederer Cristal Rosé, but on the plus side, at least I can be counted on as a cheap date. Overall, there was a broad measure of agreement on many of the wines, but where differences occurred, it just goes to show how subjective judging Champagne can be.

TOP WINES

Doyard Blanc de Blancs 2012 Grand Cru Extra Brut 97	Larmandier-Bernier Les Chemins d'Avize Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Extra-Brut 2013 94
Drappier Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 96	Leclerc Briant Blanc de Blancs Grand Blanc Brut Zéro 2013 94
De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Avize Les Pierres Vaudons Extra Brut 2012 95	Maily Exception Blanche Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut 2012 94
Gosset Grand Millésime Brut 2012 95	Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs Brut [2013] 94
Ayala Le Blanc de Blancs Brut 2013 95	Marie-Courtin Eloquence Blanc de Blancs Chardonnay Extra-Brut 2012 93
De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Le Mesnil Les Chetillons Extra Brut 2012 95	Maily Grand Cru Brut L'Intemporelle 2012 93
Eric Rodez La Pierre aux Larrons Ambonnay Grand Cru Brut Chardonnay 2013 95	Larmandier-Bernier Terre de Vertus Premier Cru Non Dosé Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2012 93
Ulysse Collin Les Roises Blanc de Blancs sExtra Brut NV [2012] 95	Deutz Brut 2012 93
Philipponnat 1522 Grand Cru Extra Brut 2012 95	Leclerc Briant Extra Brut 2013 93
Drappier Millésime Exception Brut 2013 95	Palmer & Co Brut 2013 93
Palmer & Co Brut 2012 94	Thiénot Brut 2012 93
Louis Roederer Rosé 2013 94	De Sousa Cuvée Umami Grand Cru Extra Brut 2012 93

herb-infused palate, dry, yet brilliantly articulate, bilberry and fir-tree, crisp and fine-tuned; evocative and incredibly long in both the mouth and the memory. | **91**

AR | Coppery bronze in color, fine, expressive aromatic quality, showing a degree of complexity along with attractively vivid berry-fruit aromas; finely textured berry-fruit richness on the tongue, tantalizingly gripping with its cranberryish acidity, making for a high-quality, saliva-inducing, dry rosé. | **92**

Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs 2013 (12% ABV) | **91**

EA | Pale lemon color. Mild, refined nose, still youthful. Floral and lemony, with a chalky

undernote. Crisp palate, with a zingy tartness and racy vivacity to it. Fine, ripe, fruity profile, and great, succulent length. | **92**

SF | Pale color, with a silvery tail; a rather recalcitrant mousse, chasing the center of the glass with apparent reluctance; a reduced nose; *pierre à fusil* and petrichor; so far, not so good; then, half-expected, an effusion of flavor, expressionistic and precocious in its structural naivety, yet promising much; melon, apples, and poached pears, spice, and a creamy, softly indulgent texture; the sugar and the fundamentally taut structure dance a tender *pas de deux*, with, ultimately a satisfying denouement and the prospect of further fireworks over the medium term. | **91**

AR | Pale lemon in color; a tad subdued, showing some herbal undertones and stone fruit on

the nose, light leesy notes, an instant hit of fine bubbles on the tongue, expanding into an appealing dried-fruits mousse underpinned by a lively blade of crisp, citrusy acidity. | **89**

De Sousa Cuvée des Caudalies Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Le Mesnil Les Chetillons Extra Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | **91**

EA | Deep lemon color. Evolving nose, with blown wheat, hay, and meadow notes over an apple and toffee base. A slight lift to the nose. Really powerful and vinous on the palate. A little heavy-handed overall, with a woody presence. | **88**

SF | A golden hue, and an attractive nose, which marries red fruit, spice, and gentle oak; plush and lifted, posset and meringue, red fruit and a flinty linear subtext, which pays homage to the great villages to the south of Epernay. Nuanced and subtle. Today there is a resinous subtlety; tomorrow it will probably sing more, fruit and autolytic development poised in an almost preternatural tension. | **91**

AR | Pale golden-hued bubbles here, and the fine, alluring, aromatic light toastiness suggests Chardonnay, confirmed on the palate by a delightfully full-flavored toffee-apple richness, supported by a bright, chalky acidity and serious vinosity in almost white-Burgundy mode, beautifully balanced with an elegant, dry finish. | **95**

Ulysse Collin Les Roises Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV [2012] (13% ABV) | **91**

EA | Deep golden color. Really mature nose, with tertiary aromas ruling. Plenty of fruit still on the bold nose, which jumps out at you. Big acidity on the winey, concentrated palate. Really wine rather than champagne. Time to drink up. | **89**

SF | Lively, almost luminous gold; small, well-behaved bubbles join in briefly; the nose descants fin-de-siècle indulgence, with intimations of excess... We shall see. The palate, for all that, is less powerfully inhibitive, with the citric fruit allowed more expression, albeit wrapped in an all-enveloping bed of lemon curd and quince; a slightly pinched style. | **90**

AR | Deepish golden hue, more so than most, suggesting perhaps an element of barrel-fermentation, confirmed on the nose, with a smoky, massively rich, sweet digestive biscuit and buttery maturity; and this rich, golden-buttered toast flavor carries through to the palate, which is relatively evolved and full of toasty maturity in an almost traditional Meursault-with-bubbles style, underpinned by a lovely, natural, balancing acidity; absolutely gorgeous if you love that *goût anglais* style, but it may not appeal to everybody. | **95**

Deutz Rosé Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | **90**

EA | Medium-deep salmon color. Expressive, with sweet-berry fruit. Little toastiness, but there is a spicy edge to the fruit. Structured palate, with a phenolic bite. The finish could be longer and juicier. | **89**

SF | Deeper color, soft russet, a hint of amber and magenta; the nose betrays *sous-bois* and hearth-

side rather than fruit per se; fatigued before it has even started? The palate is equally enigmatic; autumnal sepulchral intimations refuse to be required by savory nuance and the *diminuendo* is more sinister than anything else. | **88**

AR | Coppery bronze in color, this shows a degree of complexity in its aromas with a light nutty leesiness behind the berry-scented aromas, and there's fine-textured, rich berry fruit on the palate, which is very well balanced and shows both fruit and complexity in a very well-judged, intensely flavored pink Champagne that finishes on a complex and tangy, dry note. | **92**

Doyard Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Extra Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | **90**

EA | Bright lemon color. There is a vegetal and floral character to the nose, which has a touch of oxidative evolution. Great intensity and freshness on the energetic palate. Finesse needed, but the structure is great. | **87**

SF | Bright straw-gold; a gentle mousse; a nose of plum, fig, honeydew, and acacia; the palate is a little stretched, stewed even, its profile rather too sweet, compromised therefore in the light of the promise of the raw materials. | **86**

AR | Mid-gold, with a persistent stream of bubbles, this is classic Chardonnay in aroma, a light, almost chalky note to the gentle, toasty, lees-aged undertones, followed by a fine, richly flavored mousse whose filigree delicacy conveys its rich, toasty bubbles in a constant soda stream of toasty, flavorsome bubbles, then tapers very gradually in its length and weight to an elegantly fine, dry finish. | **97**

Leclerc Briant Extra Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | **90**

EA | Deep-lemon color with golden hues. Stylishly age-complexed nose, with rich, creamy, and sweet pastry notes. Rather autumnal in profile. The fruit is predominantly appley, with a whiff of dust. A round palate, with fine acid line and juiciness. Very dry finish. | **90**

SF | Flaxen, with a gentle mousse; pale at the rim. Orchard fruit, with rose water, plum, and the faintest whisper of white chocolate. The palate is broad, yet reassuringly taut, flinty, but with an evocation of Alpine meadows and a hint of lanolin. A neat and compact edifice, the sugar a little intrusive, but sure to settle down. | **88**

AR | Pale golden hue; classic aromas of light toast, with an appealing praline nuttiness, the fine, persistent bead of bubbles providing a delicacy of texture and gently toasty flavor, underpinned by a linear streak of citrusy acidity, indicating a good 5+ years of aging potential. | **93**

Maily Grand Cru Extra Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | **90**

EA | Deep evolving color. Lots of evolution on the nose, highly tertiary. Earthy spiciness and brandy barrel but also heaps of appley fruit. There is volume and vinosity on the concentrated palate. But austerity kicks in, making the dry palate finish rather short. | **90**

SF | Straw, wheat color; medium-sized bubble, somewhat sluggish; an appealing nose, dominated by yellow flowers, citric fruit, and a lick of linseed

oak; the palate is texturally oily, courtesy of the oak, no doubt, but beyond any initial shock, there is citric dexterity, then digestive biscuits and spice, and finally a rounded, entirely promising palate. Watch this space. | **89**

AR | Pale gold in color; quite evolved on the nose, with some lees-aged nuttiness and biscuity notes, while on the palate, there's an appealing mousse of fresh and fruity bubbles, nicely supported by a tangy freshness of acidity on the finish; all in all, a very appealing Champagne, with a degree of complexity. | **90**

GH Mumm Brut 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **90**

EA | Bright lemon color. Impressive, roasted coffee-bean and pastry nose, with fudge and dough. The appley fruit is underneath. Big, plush palate, with a round mouthfeel but an expansive mousse. Finishes a little short and austere. | **91**

SF | Straw color; a touch wan and still too soon after the pour; a nose of wild flowers, summer jasmine, and autumnal evenings, but too leafy in the final analysis, flint and smoke awkward rejoinders. The palate is easier, less clumsy, the smokiness ceding, however, to too much sugar, a masquerade of squandered potential and artless protocol. | **86**

AR | Mid-gold, with pleasant, sweet brioche and dried-fruits aromas, this is a well-balanced fizz, showing an appealing mousse shot through with stone-fruit flavors and light toast, and underpinned by a nice linear blade of cleansing acidity, bringing balance and freshness to a well-made fizz. | **92**

Mumm RSRV Blanc de Noirs Grand Cru Cuvée Réservee 100% Pinot Noir du Village de Verzenay Brut 2012 (12% ABV) | **90**

EA | Medium-lemon color. Pronounced and spicy red-fruit nose, with some yeasty complexity. Firm and structured palate, which could carry longer. A slightly foamy mousse. Shows some maturing signs but not peaking yet. | **90**

SF | Expressive, muscular, flamboyant fruit; only time will tell whether its finely sculpted and far-from-dissonant allegro, virtuoso incarnate, will merit the entrance fee and prompt the value of the piece in its totality. | **88**

AR | Pale lemon in color, this is bright, fresh, and invitingly aromatic, showing an appealing, effervescent delicacy of mousse and an intensity of apple and blackberry pie-like fruit that carries through from medium-weight mid-palate, to a satisfyingly dry finish. | **92**

Palmer & Co Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | **90**

EA | Deep lemon-gold color. Soft, stylishly toasty nose with heaps of pristine fruit underneath. Dried apricots, peach, vanilla, and yellow apple. Fruit-forward, but a little singular on the round and fleshy yet fresh palate. Long, juicy finish. | **91**

SF | Mute citron color; a nose of Brie skin, soft plum, and yellow flowers. The palate is rather diffuse, surprisingly short, the initial pleasure of exotic and citric fruit mitigated promptly by an overly prominent dosage and a lack of integrity

on the finish. Workmanlike, for all that. | **87**
AR | Mid-gold, this is attractively fresh and aromatic, with light biscuit and peach notes in the aromas, followed on the tongue with a well-judged, full-flavored mousse full of peachy flavors underpinned by light toasty notes and juicy, balancing acidity—all understated but ultimately well proportioned. | **93**

De Sousa Cuvée Umami Grand Cru Extra Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | **90**

EA | Deep golden color. Age-mellowed nose, with Burgundian tones to it. Yeasty complexity and nutty evolution, with spicy, appley fruit. A vinous, powerful palate, taking its space. Bold and winey, with great intensity but some austerity. Showing maturity but currently drinking very well. | **90**
SF | A bold, indulgent wine; color of Spanish gold, aromatics of quince and caramel, then a fulsome and expressive palate; orchard fruit; lemon and almost a hint of quinine; grip and a salty texture; preserved lemons and verbena; ultimately, perhaps a touch disappointing, the saltiness translating into too much acidity and the story ending on a slightly bitter note. | **86**
AR | Mid-gold in color; attractively aromatic, with an immediate freshness and gentle, biscuity allure, while on the palate the fruit is rich and full-flavored, a gentle stream of bubbles coating the tongue with stone fruit, nut, vanilla, and light toasty undertones; lots of flavor here, in a well-balanced fizz that seems to have a good decade of life ahead of it. | **93**

Thiénot Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | **90**

EA | Pale lemon. A slight lift to the expressive, toffee-laden nose. Soft and a little plump on the palate, which is a little chunky, with a sweet finish. | **90**
SF | Straw gold and lemongrass; a delicate mousse it would seem, but the palate has more power, direction, and length. Lively, but for all that, it seems a touch raw, paradoxically lactic, too; younger fruit maybe, well handled for sure... Give it time. | **87**
AR | Pale gold; vivacious and fresh in aroma, with notes of stone fruit and apple, this is a finely textured blend with a lively ripe juiciness and purity of fruit, quite vinous in its texture, with a fine, incisive blade of acidity to support the fruit quality, bringing balance and the potential for aging for five to seven years. | **93**

Deutz Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | **89**

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. There is lovely, glossy, but complex fruit to the soft, seductive nose. Orange blossom, peach, orange peel, and mirabelle plums. Less charming on the strict palate, which comes across as a little edgy and austere. Good freshness and energy, though. | **89**
SF | Straw-green; a recalcitrant mousse, which decides not to linger; a pleasant nose of cashew, bracken, guava, and baking spice; the palate is oddly chalky, wet pavements and autumn apples

a little clumsy in their interface with the sugar, a faint evocation of tobacco leaf somewhat troubling at the end. Satie mournful; distant voices, still lives. | **87**

AR | Very pale in color, almost wan; this shows sweet cashew-nut notes in its aromas, while on the palate it's well balanced, with a juicy, stone-fruit ripeness supported by a degree of complexing leesy underpinning, and tapering to a pleasing, fruity, yet dry finish. | **90**

Drappier Millésime Exception Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | **89**

EA | Developed color. Oxidative characters dominate the nose, with brown-apple and cider notes. Singular. Austere on the big, fleshy palate. | **83**
SF | Golden tint and a mousse that is both ludic and persistent; a nose of caramelized salted lemon, praline, and sourdough; plum and pâtisserie behind that. Most appealing! Sour honey, bitter lemon (verbena maybe), and poached pear on the palate, the *dosage* maybe a little high, thereby undermining the high praise hitherto lavished. | **89**
AR | Pale to mid-gold in color, this is expressively complex in its aromatic profile, showing ripe plum, light biscuit, and sweet praline notes, followed by a richly flavored, finely textured mousse, whose bubbles carry those flavors and the toast complexity of lees aging from tongue to grateful throat on a convincing and satisfying fizz that tapers to a fine, dry finish. | **95**

J Lassalle Special Club Premier Cru Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | **89**

EA | Lemon-gold color. Subtle, utterly sophisticated nose, with a toast-laden and soft, fruity profile. Pastry-shop, burned-sugar, and vanilla complexity. Really promising. Lovely intensity on the voluptuous yet fresh palate. Beautifully textured and creamy. Very charming style. Shows aging evolution but has lots of life ahead of it. | **94**
SF | Raw and slightly tired, oak impulsion driving it into mediocrity. | **82**
AR | Lemony in color, this shows pleasingly fresh, appley aromas, and a pleasantly constructed mousse of fine bubbles bisected by good, trenchant, fresh acidity in Cox's apple vein, finishing nicely dry. | **90**

Pol Roger Rosé Brut 2012 (12.5% ABV) | **89**

EA | Deep cherry-toned color. Smoky layers over rich, sweet Pinot fruit. Straightforward fruity style, with cherry confiture and strawberry. Needs finesse and complexity. Structured, with some phenolics. | **87**
SF | Extravagant magenta, soft-peach color and a nose of fireworks, wild strawberry, and verbena; come-hither palate, with wild strawberries, citron, and blueberry; all pleasingly integrated, pleasingly resonant, and with great potential. | **90**
AR | A light cherryish color; a fine raspberryish aroma supported by complexing lees-aged notes, this is delicately fruity on the palate, with a lively raspberryish quality and an underlying complexity, all finely textured and extremely well rendered in a convincing, dry rosé Champagne. | **91**

Eric Rodez Les Genettes Ambonnay Grand Cru Brut Pinot Noir 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **89**

EA | Deep golden color with an onion-skin tinge. Evolved, appley nose, with spicy baked apples, orange marmalade, and vanilla notes. Some oxidative evolution. A big, bold palate that finishes short, with a little rusticity to it. | **86**
SF | Pallor and bubbles which escape rapidly to the side of the glass; linseed oaky nose, a touch of coconut and scented almond; the palate is expressive and indulgent, far from dissenting from the vagaries brought before it. Made to a style that appeals, with reason, to those who favor oak as the imprimatur of choice; others may feel that there is too much grip and constraint and, inevitably, less by way of honest pleasure. | **88**
AR | Pale in color with light coppery tones, this announces itself immediately with fine berry and toasty notes on the nose, following through to a richly flavored mousse of strawberryish bubbles, whose counterpoint of fresh, cranberry-like acidity cuts through the richness of fruit to bring not just balance but the potential for aging for a good five to 10 years. | **93**

Louis Roederer Brut Nature 2012 (12% ABV) | **89**

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Soft, deeply fruity nose, with fragrant flowers and sugar-coated fruit. Rich but linear on the palate, which has a chalky, mineral bite to it. Fruit-packed and sweet in aromatics, even if the palate finishes very dry and palate-cleansing. | **90**
SF | Pewter going on gold; a certain indecipherable translucence; nose of plums, figs, and even toffee apple, the indulgence of the blend, the phenols pronounced yet seemingly pure; square-jawed and assertive, only the ripeness here slightly billows through the carapace. | **88**
AR | Pale gold in color, this is just a tad subdued on the nose, with just a hint of maltiness, and while there's a good expansive mousse of bubbles, the flavors are still on the subdued side; but there's fair texture and a lean streak of acidity for a pleasant, dry finish. | **88**

Louis Roederer Brut 2013 (12% ABV) | **89**

EA | Lemon color with a touch of peachy evolution. Pronounced, spicy, evolving nose, with woody complexity. The fruit comes across more strongly on the palate, which is verging on winey. Silky smooth, and it certainly has enough freshness. Showing mature already, but there is no hurry. | **90**
SF | Matted straw; a playful mousse, soon dissipated; a nose of preserved lemon, concrete, and wild flowers; the mousse quickly timid; phenolic and citric grip on the palate, pleasure deferred by the high natural acidity; aldehydes prompt the question as to whether this deferral will actually be permanent. | **88**
AR | Mid-golden hue, a tad subdued on the nose; initially the bubbles are quite aggressive as they strike the tongue, while a herbal undertow brings a tartish green-apple bite to the mousse, which, initially expansively foaming, subsides toward a dry finish that's pleasantly well balanced and fresh, if not particularly expressive. | **88**

Ulysse Collin Les Enfers Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV [2013] (12.5% ABV) | **89**

EA | A deep golden color, with amber hues. An evolved nose, with charred toasty notes lingering over pristine apple fruit. Age-complexed already but not oxidative. Delicious fruity appeal. The palate does not quite deliver the great expectations given by the nose. It is left a little hollow and dry, with accentuated acidity. Long, vinous finish. | **93**
SF | Deeper color, unpolished bronze, matted and a little miasmic. A plump nose, oxidized *avant la lettre* and an equally Hogarthian denouement, painted ladies running amok, overly made-up, wintery in outlook. | **84**
AR | Mid-gold in color, showing a degree of evolution, with a buttery aromatic note on the nose also showing some evolution; a pleasantly soft peachy middle, with ultra-soft bubbles lifted by a linear streak of lemony acidity, so almost a Champagne of two halves, both evolved and supple on the one hand, but kept fresh by its lemony finish on the other. | **89**

Ulysse Collin Les Pierrières Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV [2013] (12.5% ABV) | **89**

EA | Deep golden color. Refined yet pronounced nose, showing positive development. Soft, fruit-forward, spicy characters. Charred, toasty, and woody notes are amplified on the rich but fresh and balanced palate. Lovely transparency of fruitiness and plenty of expression. Long, juicy, vinous finish. At a lovely drinking age. | **93**
SF | Buckwheat color; a Gainsborough landscape, vanishingly small bubbles, refining themselves out of existence; and for all the bucolic grandeur of such a prospect, the reality is less panoramic, more pinched; Gala apples, mirabelle plum, even a whiff of sulfur, and a strangely workmanlike palate, which manages to be both pinched and flabby; more Rawlinson than Gainsborough, as it turns out. | **85**
AR | Pale-gold in color; now starting to show some evolved, nutty/leesy notes in the aromas, with a hint of peachy fruit, this is quite soft on the palate, showing a nice ripe peachiness combining with a gentle nuttiness, all supported by a slightly sharp blade of acidity, for a distinctly dry finish, which is most likely the product of the vintage. | **89**

Ulysse Collin Les Roises Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut NV [2013] (12.5% ABV) | **89**

EA | Deep color with orange hues. Expressive, with spicy and woody notes on the toasty nose of ripe, appley fruit. The smoky tones almost take over from the fruit. There is a yeasty floral twist to the nose. Really mature aromatics but healthy. Full, rich, flavorful palate, with fine acidity bringing lightness and vivacity. Long finish, ending on a dry, bitter note. | **90**
SF | A hint of reduction; flinty and leafy; incense and stone fruit; playful bubbles, persistent if not especially small. Nose of plum, lemon, and a hint of rhubarb; intriguing. The palate summons a swell of joyful enthusiasm, citric fruit and brioche

to the fore, then hints of sherbet and spiced pear. The pleasure is all in the attack; thereafter the message is a little less effusive; slightly pinched, more reticent than anticipated. A declamation that lacks for a clear peroration will leave a hollow message. | **87**

AR | Mid-gold in color; quite evolved on the nose, almost white Burgundy-like, with an underlying, sweet, lead-pencil note and leesy nuttiness, possibly a touch of oak; attractive mid-palate weight and texture, showing a degree of buttery or brazil-nut evolution, but happily still finishing refreshingly dry. | **91**

Pierre Gimonet & Fils 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs Sélection Belles Années Brut 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **88**

EA | Deep lemon. There are some dusty notes to the toffee, dried-apricot, and apple nose. A touch oxidative. The structured but smooth palate has vinosity to it. The finish is austere, with a phenolic bite. | **84**
SF | Sandy color; attractive nose of preserved salted lemon, crystalline, soft dried fruit, gently caramelized; *tarte tatin* and *Apfelstrudel*; Chardonnay writ large with ripe mango and pineapple, plum and fig; an apparently generous *dosage*, and a capacity for early gratification that defies the need for contemplation or any imperative potentially to keep this for the longer term. | **88**
AR | Pale greeny-yellow in color, this shows notes of sweet praline, farm butter, and cashew nut on the nose, while on the palate, it has a lovely, buttery, Chardonnay character à la white Burgundy, with an accessibly soft mousse of bubbles underscored by a fine blade of balancing fresh acidity for a good, dry finish. | **92**

AR Lenoble Bisseuil Premier Cru Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **88**

EA | Deep, peach-hued color. Odd, pungently appley nose, with a lift to it. Comes across as singular and oxidative. The palate is tight and dry. Serious style, but it comes with a certain austerity. Seems mature already. | **85**
SF | An attractive straw-gold, flaxen and finely drawn; a soft, gentle mousse and attractive aromatic of Pink Lady apples, gingerbread, and grapefruit, behind that Brie skin and sherbet. The palate has a Palladian construct, balance in all things, stone-fruit and breadly elements equally expressive, soft spice and a carefully administered *dosage* underwrite a serious intent, sui generis for sure and crafted with care and a sense of measurement. | **89**
AR | Mid-golden hue, this is a tad shy on the nose, although there is some evident light leesy development, and even a hint of berry fruit, while on the palate, the berry-fruit character comes to the fore in a very agreeably textured ripe middle, supported by good balancing acidity. | **90**

Mailly Grand Cru Nature Brut Nature 2013 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA | Deep, evolving color. Sophisticatedly mild nose, with ripe apple and pear fruit. Pastry and vanilla tones and soft, yeasty elements.

Textured palate, with a cushiony mousse. Very dry palate, amplifying the tartness and taking away slightly from the charm. | **89**
SF | Pale, adorned by dawn pewter and a playful, somewhat dissolute mousse; the nose is a little mute, unformed maybe, and shy; apéritif appeal for sure. Innocuous; only windfall apples and a hint of dried apricot. The palate is equally unassuming, somewhat amorphous and verging on the inarticulate. | **86**
AR | Pale-gold in color, a tad shy on the nose, with light biscuity autolysis starting to show; an attractively textured mousse, stone-fruit flavors, and a pleasingly crisp, lemony finish, nicely dry. | **90**

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Brut 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **88**

EA | Bright lemon color. Appealing, soft nose, with an attractive white-fruit profile. There are floral touches to the nuanced aromatics. Orange blossom, apricot pie, and fruit drops. Finely intense fruit on the zingy palate of energizing nervousity. Long and appropriately juicy on the finish. | **93**
SF | Clumsy nose; seemingly reduced and leafy at the same time; mothballs and verbena. Nothing is what it seems, as Alice says, and nothing seems to come of nothing, as Lear believed. The palate is oddly dilute, a touch foursquare, and certainly bereft of the tension of aspiration. | **84**
AR | Mid-gold in color; there's a touch of brioche and peachy sweetness to the aromas, which are on the shy side at this stage, while the peachy mousse is underpinned by an agreeable freshness of acidity, helping this fizz across the line in terms of balance and dry finish. | **88**

Ulysse Collin Les Maillons Blanc de Noirs Extra Brut NV [2013] (12.5% ABV) | **88**

EA | Evolving color, with peachy hues. A rather subdued, soft nose, with floral fruit expression. Wax, honey, and red apple. Woody tones are stronger on the firm and quite structured palate. A long, vinous finish, which comes with juiciness to it. | **89**
SF | Plangent full color, which is faintly autumnal, tumbleweed and soft amber. The nose is quite reductive, a little chamomile and salted cashew eventually revealing themselves. This is firm and resolute on the palate, the *dosage* well handled, the red fruits ceding to umami and baking spice; a touch aldehydic at the end, the purity of the message ultimately compromised. *Tarte tatin* and bacon rind, then a rather raw, uninspiring finish. | **86**
AR | Mid-gold in color. There's a faint hint of caramel on the nose, which is otherwise somewhat subdued at this stage, while on the palate, bubbles immediately attack the tongue with a certain energy and that caramel note, before turning into a lemon sherbet-like finish, scrunching the tongue with a rather pointed crispness of acidity. | **89**

All three tasters agreed that following wine was affected by TCA: AR Lenoble Gentilhomme Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Brut 2013