

COTEAUX CHAMPENOIS: STILL LIFE

Still winemaking (red, white, and rosé) is on the up in Champagne. But how good are the results? Essi Avellan MW introduces a promising, varied, if variable tasting shared with Simon Field MW and Jancis Robinson MW

The eyes of the Champenois are turning ever more toward their Burgundian neighbors. As a result of an increasing focus on terroir winemaking and the rise of new-wave grower Champagnes, still-wine making is on the rise. Climate change is helping, and the 2018–20 trilogy of warm vintages in particular has ignited excitement among both growers and houses.

During the past 50 years, we have all but forgotten the still-wine tradition of Champagne. From early Roman times until the middle of the 18th century, the region was known for its still wines. The frothing “devil’s wine” was gradually tamed, and sales of sparkling Champagne in bottles were authorized in 1728. The growth of fizzy Champagne was slow, however, and by the end of the 18th century, non-sparkling wines still made up more than 90 percent of Champagne’s output. But with the industrialization of the Champagne method, the success of the sparkling style soon outshone the popularity of still wines, and it became the region’s bread and butter.

In the early appellation laws of 1927, still wines went by the name *vin ordinaire de la Champagne viticole*. The much more inviting name *vin nature de la Champagne* was in use from 1953 until 1974, when the current Coteaux Champenois appellation was finally created. It resulted in a short-term boom, annual production rising from 1.2 million bottles to 4.2 million by 1978, after which a steady decline followed. In 2000, when French Customs stopped compiling separate statistics of Coteaux Champenois, production was down to a mere 235,000 bottles. Today, the Comité Champagne estimates average production at 75,000 bottles, with vintage differences causing significant variation from year to year.

The late 20th century’s most iconic still wines included Bollinger La Côte aux Enfants, Moët & Chandon Saran Blanc de Blancs, and Egly-Ouriet Ambonnay Rouge. Even if sparkling wine dominated, many producers maintained the still-wine tradition—if not for sale then for in-house gastronomic purposes.

A range of styles

Even if red, white, and rosé wine production is authorized, the vast majority (some 90 percent) of output is red. The entire Champagne vineyard area may produce still wines, and all of the region’s seven authorized grape varieties are permitted. Understandably, due to the tiny volumes produced, the rules in most respects follow Champagne legislation.

Traditionally, many of Champagne’s still wines were multi-vintage blends; however, most new-wave wines tend to be single-harvest, and very often single-vineyard, wines. Varietal blending takes place even if most red wines are pure Pinot Noir. Following Champagne’s micro-boom for varietal Meunier, 100 percent Meuniers are also produced. The red varieties are also in use for blanc de noirs Coteaux Champenois. Recently, the region’s historic varieties Arbane, Petit Meslier, Pinot Blanc, and Pinot Gris have started to make their way into Coteaux Champenois as well, especially in the Côte des Bar, which has most of the plantings.

Regional developments

Today, the southern part of Champagne is witnessing great enthusiasm for still wines. Simon Normand of Domaine La Borderie explains the boom with reference to climate and terroir but also to a more Burgundian mentality. “Here in the Côte des Bar, we feel quite close to our Burgundian cousins. Many local young

wine growers, such as myself, studied in Burgundy rather than in Champagne.” New-generation ways can be tasted at Drappier, too, where Hugo Drappier crafts Coteaux Champenois from Pinot Gris.

The Côte des Bar also contributes a unique wine to Champagne’s portfolio, a still rosé called Rosé des Riceys, which was once a favorite of the Sun King Louis XIV himself. Having held *appellation contrôlée* status since 1947, it has an annual average production of 50,000 bottles, from some 25 producers. Of Les Riceys’ 866ha (2,140 acres) of vineyards, 350ha (865 acres) are authorized for the making this unique rosé, which is produced by the semi-carbonic maceration of Pinot Noir grapes. The resulting wine leans toward being a light red wine rather than a classic pale rosé, but colors vary. Nevertheless, it is a gastronomic wine that can have exceptional aging potential for still rosé.

South-facing slopes of the Montagne de Reims and Grande Vallée de la Marne are now, and have been in the past, home to many fine Coteaux Champenois, and prestigious village names such as Bouzy, Ambonnay, Ay, and Cumières often feature on labels. But the rest of the Marne Valley is also getting excited about still wine. One particularly passionate grower is Benoît Tarlant, whose repertoire also includes Georgian *quevri*-vinified red and skin-contact white. This spring, he is releasing no fewer than nine Coteaux Champenois, so his belief in the category is strong. Determined to make the most of the region’s richly varied terroirs, he explains, “We make wines of Champagne, be they sparkling, still, white, pink, or red.”

Along with the new generation of growers, Champagne houses are showing increasing interest in still wines. Inspired by their first oak-barrel vinifications,

Charles Heidsieck’s *chef de cave* Cyril Brun selected in 2017 four particularly impressive barrels of Chardonnay of varying origins to be displayed as still wines. Sold as a set of four, the idea is to allow the taster to discover Champagne’s various terroirs and reach a fuller understanding of the role of the master blender. Another milestone is Louis Roederer’s launch of its Hommage à Camille Coteaux Champenois duo this spring (see pp.70–71 of this issue).

The verdict

The archetypal description of old-school Coteaux Champenois rouge was mean, lean, and green, while the whites were typically guilty of being razor-sharp and base-winey. But with a growing number of producers putting their hearts and souls into crafting serious still wines—and with climate change contributing—the category is fast evolving. Eager to discover where the region sits today with its still wines, we tasted a solid sample of 50 whites, reds, and Rosés de Riceys from good producers.

Simon Field MW was still “left uninspired,” and for Jancis Robinson MW the tasting was “far from unalloyed joy.” I had done a similar tasting three years previously so had a good idea of what to expect. Even so, I was disappointed not to find more improvement during the interim. On the other hand, we should remember that the red wines from the great trio of warm vintages 2018, 2019, and 2020 are yet to come on the market. We tasted four 2018s, which did generally show well. Tarlant’s Grand Picou Rouge was our overall winner: impressively deep colored, fruit-packed, and boldly oak-supported. In a blind tasting, one would never put this in Champagne, but we were all impressed. Egly-Ouriet’s Ambonnay Rouge is always one of the most monumental reds of the region, and the 2018 we found to be even a little too much; for Simon, a little overripe, and for Jancis, rather extracted—it craved time. But we also tasted two lovely, elegant, and varietally true, even if not similarly monumental, 2018s from Domaine La Borderie and Pierre Paillard.

The age-span of vintages was wide, and many of the older wines left us longing for more fruit and vivacity. Based on what we tasted, the red wines’ aging capacity can seem limited, since the fruitiness is often delicate, even thin, and

mostly early blooming. The use of oak was at times heavy-handed, but tannins were generally quite supple and well managed, and only a few wines were on the green side. None of the three Meunier reds impressed us, and more experience is clearly needed to tame the variety for red-wine making.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, whites did better than reds. Our overall average score for whites was 86.4; for reds, 85.3. Jancis was critical about some of the reds, finding ten of the 27 to be worth less than 80 points. But encouragingly she also scored five reds at 90+.

Some of the whites were too base-winey, lacking volume and texture, but in general they were correct, even if some were regrettably neutral. The range of Chardonnays varied from rich, oak-flavored, and tropical, to lean, tight, and mineral. We were not impressed by any of the classic Champagne blends of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir but found many of the blanc de noirs, both Meunier and Pinot Noir, quite fun. Still, our top white was Etienne Calsac’s blend of Chardonnay and historical varieties Pinot Blanc, Petit Meslier, and Arbane. There may clearly be an interesting twist to these, as we also appreciated Drappier’s Pinot Gris Trop m’en faut!

We didn’t taste any Coteaux Champenois rosé and only four Rosés des Riceys. The style is far from the now-trendy pale pink, quaffable style—rather, it is serious, even severe. Even if the phenolics were pronounced at times, we found alluring elements, especially in the Rosés des Riceys of Alexandre Bonnet, the most prolific producer of the style.

Conclusions

Even if we had few wow moments, the tasting painted an encouraging picture of the widely rising interest in still wines from Champagne and the vast repertoire of styles. It is very much work in progress, with the dwindling still-wine tradition needing to be recovered or reinvented. In today’s climate, the necessary ripeness can be achieved, and early harvests aid grape health, an essential prerequisite for good red wine in particular. But Champagne is not Burgundy, and we may hope that a distinctive range of styles is forged. In Champenois fashion, there is a rainbow of possible styles that will offer authentic and truly exciting expressions of this endlessly fascinating region. ■



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CHAMPAGNE IS NOT BURGUNDY, AND WE MAY HOPE THAT A DISTINCTIVE RANGE OF STYLES IS FORGED

ESSI AVELLAN MW’S TOP WINES

Paul Bara Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Grand Cru 2015 91
Domaine La Borderie Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Devoix 2018 91
Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Montgueux NV [2017] 91
J de Telmont Coteaux Champenois Insolite Chardonnay 2015 91
Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Villers-Marmery [2017] 90
Coessens Coteaux Champenois Rouge Lieu-Dit Largillier Vendange Égrappée 2017 90
Philipponnat Coteaux Champenois Rouge Mareuil 2015 90
Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Rouge Grand Picou à St-Agnan 2018 90
Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Vertus [2017] 89
Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Cumières 2012 89
P Louis Martin Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Grand Cru 2013 89
Bollinger Coteaux Champenois Rouge Ay La Côte aux Enfants 2015 88
Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Oger Blanc [2017] 88
Drappier Coteaux Champenois Blanc de Pinot Noir Perpetuité NV 88
Egly-Ouriet Coteaux Champenois Rouge Ambonnay Cuvée des Grands Côtés Vieilles Vignes 2018 88
Les Frères Mignon Coteaux Champenois Blanc 2016 88
Georges Remy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Le Chapeau de Fer 2014 88
Georges Remy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Les Vaudayants 2016 88
Cristian Senez Coteaux Champenois Rouge Réserve NV 88
Georges Vesselle Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Cuvée Véronique-Sylvie NV 88

AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	86	70–92
EA	87	70–91
SF	86	70–91
JR	84	72–92

Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Rouge Grand Picou à St-Agnan [Pinot Noir] 2018 | 91
(13% ABV)

EA | Opaque purple color. Full-on, powerful, oak-enhanced nose, with vanilla and spicy tones over charred blueberry, ink, and blackberry fruit. Very much on the dark-fruit side, with tar and animally evolution rising in glass over time. There is plenty of volume on the sweet, rich palate, which finishes just a little short, with brisk acidity and plentiful tannins. Very rich and full for Coteaux Champenois, if a little too oak-dominant for the time being. | 90

SF | Dense crimson, onyx at the core; nose dominated by oak; charcoal, coal tar, and graphite; one has to infer dark fruit in this instance. The compote fruit seduces on the palate, creamy vanillin and soft spice in support; the tannins are ripe and elegant; the gentle volatility only enhances an impression of wonderfully idiosyncratic decadence, the quality of the fruit more than meriting such a diversion. | 91

JR | Extraordinarily deep crimson—almost black! This smells just like a rather successful New World oaked Pinot! With its sweetness and concentration, it is definitely making a point, pretty forcefully. Is this Coteaux Champenois taken to an extreme? It's quite fun, even if pungent and dramatic. Still quite youthful but with bags of personality and persistence and—believe it or not—a certain mineral quality. Drink 2021-26. | 92

Etienne Calsac Coteaux Champenois Blanc Photogramme [Chardonnay/Pinot Blanc/Petit Meslier/Arbane] 2019 (12% ABV) | 90

EA | Bright, lemon-green color with a golden tinge. Expressive, sweetly fruity nose, with a light lift to it. An oily, winy texture to it and balanced, crisp acidity. On the palate, the varnishy characters become more prominent, but there is a supporting, vanilla-laden, oaky tone, too. Long, sweet finish. | 87

SF | Straw-green, bright and clear, the slightest of spritzes to enliven us all; leesy, mealy, a dash of honey and oyster shell; one recalls unoaked Chablis, youthful vigor writ large and as of yet somewhat unformed; a fascinating blend; tradition rolls down the years, and there is sapidity and salinity on the finish. Plate of rock oysters, anyone? | 90

JR | Mid-gold. Now, this has a really interesting nose. Complex, with some spice and dried apricot, plus an interesting reductive note on the finish. A genuine addition to the canon here, with a beginning, middle, and end to the tasting experience. Quite long. Drink 2020-25. | 92

Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Montgoux [Chardonnay] [2017] (12% ABV) | 89

EA | Lemon-green color. Stylishly Burgundian nose, with a touch of gunpowder and high-quality oak supporting the fine, delicate fruitiness. Compact and focused on the beautifully acid-lined palate. Long, pristinely fruity finish. | 91

SF | Straw-bright with a watery rim; subtle

aromatic of autumnal orchard fruit and a hint of fig; behind that maybe petrichor, but it is very subtle. The palate is held together by firm acidity and has medium-plus length; correct and upstanding, if currently lacking just a little excitement. | 88

JR | Nicely integrated, composed nose, but it smells as though it may be fading. Good grip and balance. If served this blind, I might take this for a slightly muted Chablis. Drink 2018-22. | 87

Coessens Coteaux Champenois Rouge Lieu-Dit Largillier Vendange Égrappée [Pinot Noir] 2017 (13% ABV) | 89

EA | Medium-deep ruby color. Youthful oak-lined nose, with clean dark-cherry and blackberry fruit. Fine spiciness on the adequately rich palate, which comes with substantial but ripe tannins. A well-made wine with a modern feel to it. Will gain in complexity and needs to integrate the wood a little better. | 90

SF | Ruby red; a nose of strawberry, cherry, and spice; cinnamon and *sous-bois*; gentle oak sits nicely, unobtrusive but adding weight and an alluring complexity. The palate is soft and approachable; the milky texture hints at pashmina, the thread fine and discreet, any intimations of oak now subsumed by the seductive nuance of the palate. Charming and soft, lacking, for some, a backbone of tense acidity, but eminently agreeable over the short and medium term. | 91

JR | Blackish crimson. Good lift on the nose and indications of fully ripe Pinot fruit. Just a tad too much like sweet butter for perfection but it's a flattering wine that has some light tannin. Drink 2019-25. | 87

P Louis Martin Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Grand Cru [Pinot Noir] 2013 (12% ABV) | 89

EA | Medium-deep ruby color. Attractive sweet cherry fruit on the evolving but fruity nose. Turns towards cherry essence over time. Stylishly silky on the smooth palate, with age-mellowed tannins and good but not excessive freshness. A complete and rather elegant whole. Ready to drink. | 89

SF | Dense blood to vermilion; the nose boasts wild strawberry and hints of orange and verbena; a touch of smoke, too. Nicely evolved palate, just a hint of volatility; plum, raspberry, damson, and sloe. Holding up nicely—*à point* now, not overwhelmingly complicated. | 87

JR | Rather evolved color but with a lip-smacking nose that promises well. Lots of ripe fruit and charm—and proper Pinot come-on, with great balance. Amazing this has lasted so well. This is proper Pinot, with subtlety. Not too sweet, not too dry. Layers of juice, raspberry and plum fruit and spice. The tannin is fine but not intrusive. Dry but not drying finish. The star of the tasting? Drink 2018-26. | 92

Paul Bara Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Grand Cru [Pinot Noir] 2015 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA | Ruby color. Inviting nose with juicy cherry

fruitiness. Lovely fruit expression, very clean and correct and comes with nuances. Stylishly silky on the harmonious and friendly palate. Fine freshness and vibrancy up until the very end of the fruity, even playful palate. A smart and pleasant whole. | 91

SF | Ruby, rich, regal, a little syrupy; the nose recalls undergrowth, autumn leaves, and pine cones. The palate is less advanced in the sense that the secondary fruit (plum and damson) has yet to take on a discernibly syrupy texture. Nonetheless, overall the wine appears clumsy and workmanlike, and certainly more than a little strained at the end of the palate. | 86

JR | Dark garnet color—looks quite healthy. Sweet, fruity nose that is recognizably Pinot. Juicy and complete, this is a well-constituted red wine which still has something to give. A little dry on the end, it would drink well with a meal now. (And if you had been tasting Champagne all day, you would fall on it with pleasure.) Drink 2018-23. | 87

Bollinger Coteaux Champenois Rouge Aÿ La Côte aux Enfants [Pinot Noir] 2015 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA | Deep ruby color. There is spicy depth to the red-cherry, vanilla, capsicum, and cherry-drop nose. Some bizarre meaty evolution. Structured on the palate, with grippy tannins bringing a little hardness. Traditional style. Ready to drink. | 88

SF | Mature, modestly browning color. Savory, hints of charcuterie and dried leaves—umami, maybe. Hard to love, despite attempts to do so, because the fruit is stripped, the acidity unashamedly brutal and unreconstructed. Too late to feign Pommard regality. Maybe not the best bottle? | 85

JR | Deep garnet color. There is quite intense ripe fruit here, overlaid with a lightly metallic note. Lots of rather joyous ripe fruit, with masses of Pinot character—almost exaggerated Pinot character. Full-on wine that I think few would put in Champagne if served it blind. Perhaps made from fruit with a carefully reduced yield? But well done. Drink 2019-25. | 90

Alexandre Bonnet Rosé des Riceys La Forêt [Pinot Noir] 2017 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA | Pale ruby red. Pronouncedly sweet-berried nose with cherries and strawberry essence. There is a good volume of fruit also on the phenolic palate, finishing a little hard and short. | 85

SF | Vermillion, a surreal sunset. Nose of sloes, blueberry, and a distant cassis—strangely pleasing. The palate recalls tobacco and blackcurrant leaf, a little resinous, the phenolics relatively strident, which, together with the firm acidity, provide an intriguing backdrop. Hard to immediately identify a constituency that may flock to this style. | 88

JR | Attractive floral Pinot perfume. Neat and crisp, vital fruit without a trace of jamminess. Really bracing and lively. Clean and fresh: bone-dry but by no means fruitless. Drink 2019-23. | 90

Domaine La Borderie Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Devoix [Pinot Noir] 2018 (12% ABV) | 88

EA | Medium-deep ruby color. Soft fruity nose,

JANCIS ROBINSON MW'S VERDICT

There is no pattern to follow in this category, which is all over the place, including skin-contact orange wine, which is quite fun. All of the whites were quite deep colored—no water-white specimens—but too often there was a lack of vinosity. Very few of the whites were like Chablis; some seemed to be trying to be white Burgundy, others *sui generis*. The rosé colors were very distinctive—they definitely didn't get the Provençal pink memo!. All look like young Pinot *saignée*. But the reds were quite amazingly deep colored! Overextraction was common.

I was surprised by how many red wines there were—some reminded me of old-fashioned New World Pinots. Oak mastery was by no means guaranteed. Maybe these vintages were a bit too early to see the climate-change effect? I was amazed that there were so many old reds.

This tasting was far from unalloyed joy. I suspect this is an overpriced category—high prices because of rarity rather than inherent quality. But contrary to expectations, there were some wines that were valid as still wines, and they weren't all too tart.

TOP WINES

Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Rouge Grand Picou à St-Agnan 2018 | 92

Etienne Calsac Coteaux Champenois Photogramme 2019 | 92

Doyard Coteaux Champenois Blanc Vertus En Vieux Fombres 2015 | 90

Alexandre Bonnet Rosé des Riceys La Forêt 2017 | 90

Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Blanc Les Collinardins Cuvée Parcelle 2018 | 90

H Goutorbe Coteaux Champenois Rouge Aÿ 915 2009-inox / 2015-boisé (2015 Base) | 90

Collet Coteaux Champenois Blanc Epernay 2015 | 90

Les Frères Mignon Coteaux Champenois Blanc 2017 | 90

Coessens Coteaux Champenois Rouge Lieu-Dit Largillier Vendange Entière 2017 | 90

Bollinger Coteaux Champenois Rouge Aÿ La Côte aux Enfants 2015 | 90

Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Blanc Kvevri Notre Dame à Celles-lès-Condé 2019 | 90

with dark and red cherries and spicy tones. Rather primary still. Juicy medium-bodied palate, with lovely, soft phenolics. Long, fruity finish. In a year or two, when the nose will show more complexity, this will be a very elegant Coteaux. | 91

SF | Ruby red, magenta maybe. Cindery, slightly herbaceous nose behind the black cherry and the gorse; a hint of verbena and Brie skin somewhere, too—slightly unusual, therefore. Normal service is resumed on the palate, which is a feast of crushed raspberry, grip, and self-belief; broad, open vistas of pleasure and gastronomic potential opening up over the medium term. | 90

JR | Lighter crimson than some. Rather a livid color. Fresh, ferny Pinot Noir aromas. A bit simple, but at least it is not overdone and seems varietally true. Pretty demanding acidity at this point. Drink 2021-24. | 84

Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Vertus [Chardonnay] [2017] (12% ABV) | 88

EA | Deep lemon color. Pronouncedly charred nose, with high-quality oak coming through in a stylish but strong way. A rich melange of sweet pineapple fruit, dried apricots, and pastry tones. Brisk acidity takes over on the voluptuous palate. Long, intensely fruity, juicy palate. | 89

SF | Bright, with attractive aromatics dominated by vanilla and papaya; inviting and persistent. The tropical inclinations are developed on the palate, a leesy, mealy bed on which the fruit can stretch out, with only the firm acidity to hold the ensemble in check, which it does with great diligence. | 89

JR | Bright gold with a greenish tinge. A bit of oak on the nose but not excessively so—just! The acidity is quite marked, and it doesn't taste as

savory as a white Burgundy. You probably needed to wait till 2020 before the oak had receded sufficiently. Drink 2020-23. | 87

Collet Coteaux Champenois Blanc Epernay [Meunier] 2015 (11.5% ABV) | 88

EA | Blushing color. Some nice evolution to the clean and fruit-forward nose, with cherry, peach, vanilla, and floral fruit. The palate, with pencil shavings and a red-berry character, is rather tart, overtaking the silky feel on the palate. Juicy finish. | 87

SF | Straw, with a hint of soft brick from the red grapes. A neutral nose; Gala apples, something a little smoky, crushed pepper maybe, vestigial red fruit lurking somewhere. The palate holds this line. The overall impression is somewhat mournful; once again, one is lost in contemplation of what might have been. Light on its feet for sure, but this may be seen as a lack of gravitas and concentration. | 86

JR | A salmon-pink tinge to the deep straw color. Pinot perfume. Creamy texture and not too tart for once. The fruitiness of Meunier may work particularly well for a still wine? Drink 2017-21. | 90

Doyard Coteaux Champenois Blanc Vertus en Vieux Fombres [Chardonnay] 2015 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA | Deep lemon-gold color. A notably oxidative nose, with appley fruit and dusty grappa tones. More interesting on the pronounced, rather powerful palate, with good fruity length. | 86

SF | Bright, with a little wheat coloring to indicate development. The nose is lactic, yet laced with exotic fruit, pineapple and guava among

them. Lees stirring and oak maturation provide flamboyant makeup, but the raw material thereunder is concealed, all the more so as it gives every sign of being a little thin and lackluster. A valiant attempt, nonetheless. | 88

JR | Now, this still wine has actually evolved aromatically—hooray! It very charmingly splits the difference between Champagne and the Côte de Beaune; bone-dry and savory/toasty, with notes of yeast extract. I wouldn't age it much longer, but I admire what has been achieved. Drink 2017-21. | 90

Drappier Coteaux Champenois Trop m'en faut! NV (12% ABV) | 88

EA | Lemony, a little hazy. Soft, even mute nose, with appley tones and some toasty evolution. Crisp and zingy on the fleshy, youthful palate. Clean and correct but on the base-winey side. | 87

SF | Soft color, a gentle spritz and aromatic that is a touch milky, with lanolin, pineapple, and poached pear behind that. Attractive fruit on the palate, too, mirabelle plum and hints of apricot and nectarine. Hard to discern a clear audience here, but neatly assembled and assuredly elegant. | 89

JR | Deep straw. This certainly smells like a lively young Chardonnay and not unlike a Chablis. Vigorous and vital. Not that complex but well balanced and well made. Drink 2021-25. | 87+

Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Cumières [Pinot Noir] 2015 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA | Medium-deep ruby color. The nose surprises with its sweet, vanilla oaky first attack. Cherry and blueberry fruit are lined with spicy tones. Round and soft, showing structural evolution, too. Some good elements there, even if the oak seems a little heavy-handed and not yet fully integrated. | 87

SF | Ruby red, a soft, plush color holding nicely. The aromatic likewise; brambly fig and rosehip and then a hint of thyme, laurel maybe, something from the kitchen garden. The palate pulls Giacometti sinew, but that is exactly as it should be, and in this instance, the strain is not stretched and the stretch is not strained. Evolving with assurance at no lack of speed. Approachable now with a plate of pork or veal. | 89

JR | Rather dull, grayish mid-garnet color. A hint of licorice (but not fruit) on the nose. Lightweight, but nothing is out of balance—though the light tannins are still in evidence. Not unlike a fairly modest 2015 red Burgundy, but it certainly has potential for future development. Just a bit dry on the end at the moment. Drink 2020-26. | 87+

Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Oger [Chardonnay] [2017] (12% ABV) | 87

EA | Glossy lemon color. There is a lovely toasty aging tone to the sweetly fruity nose. Lovely oily volume on the palate, which comes with accentuated acidity. Tropical fruit and dried fruits, too. The well-balanced oaky sweetness does not overwhelm the luscious fruit. | 88

SF | Pale straw, the gentlest of spritzes billowing

softly with the swell of a swirl; almost pungent aromatic of plum, preserved lemon, and crushed rock. The palate shares these phenolic inclinations and has a degree of girth, which may or may not be puppy fat, as well as showing all the signs of providing gentle pleasure over the short to medium term. | **87**

JR | Bright pale gold. Light nose but quite a bit of extract on the palate. Very savory and concentrated. A valid style. Clean and brisk. Bone-dry. Drink 2019-22. | **87**

Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Villers-Marmery [Chardonnay] [2017] | **87**
(12% ABV)

EA | Medium-deep lemon color. Soft and generous nose, with inviting, sweetly fruity tones, and a pastry, wax, and ground-coffee complexity. Really rich and sweetly oaky on the voluptuous, oily palate. Impressively velvety and voluminous, but it comes with great vivacity. | **90**
SF | Youthful nose, a little reduced maybe; very steely acidity has a firm grip that, for the foreseeable future, it may be disinclined to relinquish. | **83**

JR | Lightly sweet and spicy on the nose. Not generous in terms of fruit ripeness but perfectly well judged and not a copy of a Chardonnay from another region. Clean and fresh, with no sign of decline. Just a bit lightweight. Drink 2019-22. | **87**

Drappier Coteaux Champenois Blanc de Pinot Noir Perpetuité NV (ABV NA) | **87**

EA | Blushing color. Overt and fruit-forward nose with red fruits and ripe peaches. Lots of delicious fruits but still on the base-winey side. Fresh palate with fleshiness and crisp acidity. | **88**
SF | Bright, straw, with a modest spritz, the nose a little mute; maybe shrouded in oak at the moment. The palate is rendered with proficiency: pineapple, soft spice, and hints of verbena and russet apple. Acidity prominent, but a pleasing concentration of fruit and a spicy kick on the finish. | **87**

JR | Very light bronze blush to the straw color. Fun! This has grip, acidity, and fruit. It's pretty youthful, and I wouldn't pay a lot for it, but it has a fair amount of potential. I'm not sure I can taste the Pinot in it. Drink 2020-24. | **87**

Egly-Ouriot Coteaux Champenois Rouge Ambonnay Cuvée des Grands Côtés Vieilles Vignes [Pinot Noir] 2018 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Deep purple color. Sweet nose, with violets, vanilla, and blackberries. Even jammy tones. Oak comes across, alongside some unpleasant aromatics. Harder on the palate, structured with hefty phenolics. A lot of volume there, and it needs time to integrate it all. | **88**

SF | Deep ruby, brick fade at the rim. Attractive nose, apple crumble and plum pudding, a little stretched, perhaps. A touch of *surmaturité* maybe, but nothing volatile or overtly "made." On the palate, the summer-pudding appeal is in the ascendant. Attractive but maybe a little short,

the warm creamy core of fruit approachable now and delightfully so. | **89**

JR | Extraordinarily deep crimson—almost black. Sweet, buttery nose. Very sweet palate. Not the most refreshing red wine but certainly not one you would expect to find in Champagne. There's even a bit of heat on the end, suggesting an alcohol level above 12.5%. Not refined but attention-grabbing, that's for sure. A bit overextracted. Drink 2021-25. | **84**

Guy de Forez Les Riceys Rosé Côte des Bar [Pinot Noir] 2017 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA | Pale ruby color. Mild, sweetly berried nose showing some evolution. Cranberries, lingonberries, and wild strawberries. Some forest-floor and spice complexity. Nicely textured, light and only mildly phenolic on the palate. Good drinkability. | **87**
SF | Amber, damask; soft at the rim, with attractive aromatics of briary and wild strawberries. The palate has more weight than expected, held in worthy counterpoint to the firm acidity. Gastronomic, yet without the energy and tension that are the hallmarks of the most accomplished pink wine. | **87**

JR | Fairly broad, sweet, smooth fruit on the nose. I don't think it will develop further, but it's all in reasonable balance now, even if it lacks a really ripe fruity core on the palate. Just a little pinched on the end. Drink 2019-21. | **87**

Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Blanc Les Collinardins Cuvée Parcellaire [Chardonnay] 2018 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA | Pale lemon-green color. Mild, youthful nose with lemon-floral fruit with yeasty tones. Lean and zingy, very base-wine-like with a vanilla touch to the medium-long finish. | **85**
SF | Modest straw color, gentle spritz; fermentation aromatics; the construction itself almost overwhelming the personality of the wine; pineapple, greengage, and banana, too, rather brusque phenolics, and a chronicle of quality foretold rather than lived through the moment... In 12 months' time it will settle down. Village rather than cru. | **87**

JR | Deep straw-gold color. Strong aroma of baked apples. Real grip on the palate and lightly yeasty. Confident wine that is distinctively Champenois in style. Are the tannins from the grape skin or oak? I think the former. Good current drinking. Lightly toasty on the reasonably persistent finish. Drink 2020-23. | **90**

Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Cumières Rouge [Pinot Noir] 2012 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Medium-deep ruby color. Farmyardy and undergrowth development on the sweet cherry and raspberry nose. Losing some fruit on the palate already and comes with some green capsicum aromas. Still pleasant and savory, with some complexity. A good time to drink it up. | **89**
SF | Good color, holding fast; pleasant aromatic of rosehip syrup and spruce; the palate has balanced acidity (for a change!), a citric pull,

and soft chalky tannins. There is a hint of fig and spruce behind that. The oak has held it together with charm and dexterity. | **87**

JR | Glowing blackish ruby. Sweet and still with some oaky notes—one of those New World Pinot styles on the nose, and a bit weak and soft on the palate. Unfocused. Drying finish. Drink 2016-21. | **84**

H Goutorbe Coteaux Champenois Rouge Ay 915 2009-inox / 2015-boisé [Pinot Noir] (2015 Base) (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Medium-deep ruby color with garnet hues. Sweet cherry fruit on the nose. Savory, with animally and spicy evolution and some oxidative notes. Soft, silky palate, with age-mellowed tannins. Traditional in style, less on the fruity side. | **85**

SF | Evolving color, brick to amber on the rim. A nose troubled by volatility and rather stewed fruit, its sinews protruding rather aggressively; an Otto Dix painting, far from flattering in the final analysis. All the more irritating since there is a clear perception of what the wine might have been or may have been. Hard to say! | **87**

JR | Dark ruby. Some Pinot Noir fragrance here. And an impressive spread of ripe red fruits on the front palate, followed by acidity and tannin that slightly overshadow the fruit. Ambitious wine with real life made for the long term. Drink 2021-26. | **90**

Coessens Coteaux Champenois Rouge Lieu-Dit Largillier Vendange Entière [Pinot Noir] 2017 (13% ABV) | **87**

EA | Ruby color. A bit stinky, savory on the nose, with lactic tones. Brisk palate, quite tart. | **84**
SF | Ruby red, bright yet with the hints of a crepuscular fade evidenced on closer scrutiny: attractive nose, damson, plum, and hints of menthol. A hint of volatility carries onto the palate. Acetate and varnish thereby slightly compromise the edifice. The problem is amplified by further aeration. So near... | **86**

JR | Deep, healthy-looking garnet color. A pretty convincing, complex nose that could signal a red Burgundy. Sweet start and virtually no tannin (but so what?). Good fruit/acid balance. This is a wine I would happily drink with a meal today. Gently made, which may be the right course. Drink 2020-24. | **90**

Les Frères Mignon Coteaux Champenois Blanc [Chardonnay] 2017 (11.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Bright lemon-green color. Fruit-forward appley nose, with cider, hay, and lemon tones. A touch of oxidation. Seems a little base-wine-like on the nose, but the firm palate comes with nice structure and vinosity. | **86**
SF | Soft and modest in virtually every respect; apple fruit, a hint of poached pear and yellow plum, a lick of creamy oak, hardly extravagant; maybe a whisper of coconut. All very discreet, one may surmise. Angular. | **86**
JR | Apple skins on the nose. Quite edgy. Quite fun! This tastes as though it has had a bit of

skin contact and has therefore morphed into something with a bit more personality than the average Coteaux Champenois. Lip-smacking—gets the saliva flowing. Light in alcohol but not in personality. Drink 2019-23. | **90**

Pierre Paillard Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Les Mignottes [Pinot Noir] 2018 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA | Medium-deep ruby. Some spicy and earthy aging complexity on the cherry and strawberry nose. Silky palate, with balanced tannins and acidity. Pleasurable, even elegant, and will gain in complexity from further time in the bottle. | **90**
SF | Ruby red, bright and poised. Somewhat mute on the nose, the red fruit a little compromised. The palate is also one-dimensional; maybe a little stretched, the fruit maybe yielding too much. The wine is simple and lacks generosity, enfin. A touch of botrytis at the back, too? | **84**
JR | Grayish mid-crimson. This smells raw and a bit fusty. Then uncomfortably sweet on the palate. But there is some true Pinot Noir flavor buried in there... | **NS**

Georges Remy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Les Vaudayants [Pinot Noir] 2016 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA | Pale ruby color. Elegantly subtle nose, with sweet cherry fruit and some undergrowth and mushroomy evolution. Silky and lively on the juicy, lightweight palate. An elegant style, if slightly old-fashioned. Ready to drink. | **88**
SF | Bright ruby-russet; a hit of evanescent amber, something a little soupy in the wine's sluggish disinclination to follow the swirl. Nose of rosehip, figs, and bilberry jam—so far, so good. Thereafter, stewed notes come into their own; the palate seems stretched and a little clumsy, far from the blue remembered hills of a regal vintage; hollow and a little short—a shame, since there is a faintly raffish appeal here, at least for this faintly raffish taster. | **87**

JR | Transparent ruby color. Sweet oaky nose—reminds me of New World Pinots a decade ago. Not unpleasant but not very sophisticated. A light floral touch and decent fruit-acid balance with only light tannin influence. Not hard work at all in terms of the acid level. Drink 2019-23. | **87**

Gallimard Père & Fils Rosé des Riceys [Pinot Noir] 2017 (12% ABV) | **86**

EA | Pale ruby red color. Soft strawberry jam, lingonberry, and cranberry juice nose. Not much evolution. Juicy fruitiness on the palate that comes with hefty tannins and feisty acidity. Correct but straightforward. | **86**
SF | Foxy russet color; nose of rosehip syrup, bilberries, and hearthside. Evolved for a rosé, maybe with gastronomic intentions, the shrill acidity shrouding purpose somewhat. An autumnal, challenging, late piece of work—too late? | **87**
JR | Smells like weedy and slightly jammy Pinot Noir. Definite Pinot character—more earthy than sublime. Rather rustic tannins. And fairly tart. Drink 2019-21. | **84**

Alexandre Bonnet Coteaux Champenois Blanc Les Riceys [Chardonnay/Pinot Noir] 2019 (12.5% ABV) | **85**

EA | Pale lemon-green color. Elegantly restrained nose, with a touch of gunpowder bringing complexity over the cool, crunchy fruitiness. Apples, peaches, and fruit drops. Lean and tart on the vibrant and finely textured, detailed palate. A little singular and on the base-winey side but very correct, with some elegance to it. | **86**
SF | Straw, with a hint of green and a luminosity, too; nose somewhat anonymous, spring flowers on a chilly morning, the hay wain before the workers have arrived; the palate is more interesting; real *vin clair* definition; flint and eggshells; quince and angelica root. What might have been can only be read through the chiseled runes... | **86**
JR | Bright pale straw. Looks quite technical after the orange wine I have just tasted [Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Blanc Kvevri Notre Dame à Celles-lès-Condé 2019]. A rather industrial nose. But technically faultless. Just a bit dull. I think this would be better with carbon dioxide and a bit of age. Drink 2020-22. | **82**

Domaine La Borderie Coteaux Champenois Blanc Les Devoix [Chardonnay/Pinot Blanc/Petit Meslier/Arbane] 2018 (12% ABV) | **85**

EA | Pale lemon-green color. There is an odd lactic toffee tone to the otherwise muted nose. Bitterness and harshness on the palate. Not a pleasant whole. | **83**
SF | Green with hints of pewter. Aromas bestowed by low fermentation temperatures; boiled sweets and a hint of the Pink Lady. The palate is more interesting; orchard fruits are joined by nectarine and mirabelle plum; hints of cinnamon and white pepper, too. This recalls gentle Alsace Pinot Gris; soft, unassuming, but strangely moreish. | **89**
JR | Not as interesting and convincing as the [Etienne Calsac Coteaux Champenois Photogramme 2019] on the nose. There is a hint of oak and fruit that doesn't seem quite ripe enough to carry it. Not much vinosity. No follow-through. Drink 2019-21. | **84**

Benoît Déhu Coteaux Champenois Blanc La Rue des Noyers [Meunier] 2011 (12% ABV) | **85**

EA | Deep lemon color. Odd, charred nose, all about gunpowder, roasted coffee beans, and fireplace notes. Very interesting, succulent, silky palate but the smoky aromatics are just too much. | **85**
SF | Flaxen straw, bright and with an attractive aroma of apple crumble and lemon posset; welcoming, at least. The welcome party is brief, however, because leafy, almost vegetal notes take over, and the finish is strangely metallic, shards of acidity lingering. | **83**
JR | Deep coppery straw color. Very edgy nose with some reductive character and lots of smokiness. A love or loathe wine? Lots of development here and masses of fruit still, but it's a little sour on the end. Perhaps the right food would distract from this, because the wine otherwise has lots going for it. Bravo for lasting this long. Drink 2014-20. | **87**

Benoît Déhu Coteaux Champenois Rouge La Rue des Noyers [Meunier] 2013 (12% ABV) | **85**

EA | Deep ruby color. Volatile on the powerful nose. Lots of farmyardy and savory tones alongside sweet cherry fruit. Plentiful palate, with freshness and structure. Lots of interesting elements but the volatility takes away from the charm. Tannins take over the finish. | **87**
SF | Evolved color; nose of figs and dark chocolate; not unattractive, plum and soft spice behind that. A touch of sulfur, also volatility, the faults lining up and reluctant to dissipate. The palate has good weight for all that, spice and soft plum pudding. Holding up well, especially contextually, but structurally far from entirely ept. | **87**
JR | Deep blackish ruby. Juicy fruit and nothing too extreme on the nose. But the overall effect is a little raw because of the high acid and the fading fruit. Drink 2016-20. | **82**

Drappier Coteaux Champenois Rouge de Pinot Noir Permission 2018 (ABV NA) | **85**

EA | Purple color. Odd aromas, lactic and unfinished. Unpleasant. Sweet dark-cherry fruit underneath. Well-managed tannins and good structure. Shame about the odd aromatics. | **86**
SF | Bold, regal ruby, curtain plush from the Victorian Grand. A little amorphous on the nose; brooding, slightly aggressive yet unsure of itself. On the palate, Gala apples, greengage, and white pepper; raw and hard to judge at this stage; a little foursquare today and hard to discern much by way of a route to an elegant peroration. | **86**
JR | Deep blackish crimson. A light buttery note on the nose. Soft fruit without much tannin and surprisingly low acidity. A youthful, unformed wine with plum juice notes and not too much charm, but it may develop into something more appealing. Drink 2022-26. | **84+**

Les Frères Mignon Coteaux Champenois Blanc [Chardonnay] 2016 (11.5% ABV) | **85**

EA | Lemon color with a slight haziness. Mildly fruity, evolving nose, with yellow apples and fruit drops. Lovely volume and a winey quality on the palate that finishes with a bitter note. Nicely integrated acidity and a restrained whole but could use some more character. | **88**
SF | Pale with an apply nose; modest spritz, something a little hazy maybe. The palate is raw, youthful preserved lemons to the fore, yet the modest alcohol lends it appeal, which will harmonize over the next year or so. | **88**
JR | Deep straw color. Definitely fizzing... Is this intended? Hint of butterscotch on the nose. Fume finish, without quite enough fruit on the mid-palate. But if it's meant to be lightly sparkling then that's another matter. Drink 2018-20. | **79**

Bruno Paillard Vin Blanc des Coteaux Champenois Le Mesnil [Chardonnay] 2018 (12% ABV) | **85**

EA | Bright lemon color. There is some charred complexity to the mild, lemony and appley nose. A lovely, oily, soothing quality to the texture.

SIMON FIELD MW'S VERDICT

This was a fascinating prospect, climate change and a series of ripe and relatively straightforward vintages providing a bedrock of security to challenge those *idées reçues* that linger too long on memories of lean, grassy wines; cadaverous, mean-spirited wines; thin and rather prickly wines, possibly in both senses... A radical reappraisal then? Eureka moments were few from the gentle ladies in their secure tasting booths adjacent; nor from your correspondent, alas.

When only four wines score at 90 or above (the top two scoring 91) and only ten (20 percent of the total) at 89 or above, it has clearly not been an especially impressive tasting. Some attractive reds (the reds fared better than whites for me), the best examples (Tarlant Grand Picou 2018 and Coessens Largillier Vendange Égrappée 2017) not strained too hard, with pretty and elegant fruit

approachable now, but not armored for the longer term. Of the big guns, Egly-Ouriet's Grand Cru from Ambonnay had plenty of charm, and I also liked Geoffroy's Cumières Rouge. The wine that turned out to be Bollinger's La Côte aux Enfants, from 2015, seemed to be tired, surprisingly so. I have tasted far better from this famous site.

The whites were generally (inevitably) monochrome. Where notes took one down into pools of oyster shell and flint, one longed for the integrity of an uncooked Chablis, even a Petit Chablis; and where the wines were riper and more exotic, there was often a sense of something a little bit forced or forged. The real signature of Champagne is writ large in the evanescence of its bubbles. But we knew that already. Most of these wines were made with competence and application, but few were genuinely inspiring.

TOP WINES

Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Rouge Grand Picou à St-Agnan 2018 **91**

Coessens Coteaux Champenois Rouge Lieu-Dit Largillier Vendange Égrappée 2017 **91**

Etienne Calsac Coteaux Champenois Photogramme 2019 **90**

Domaine La Borderie Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Devoix 2018 **90**

Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Vertus [2017] **89**

Drappier Coteaux Champenois Trop m'en faut! NV **89**

Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Cumières 2015 **89**

Egly-Ouriet Coteaux Champenois Rouge Ambonnay Cuvée des Grands Côtés Vieilles Vignes 2018 **89**

Domaine La Borderie Coteaux Champenois Blanc Les Devoix 2018 **89**

Alexandre Salmon Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Grèves 2016 **89**

Charles Heidsieck Coteaux Champenois Blanc Montgueux [2017] **88**

Doyard Coteaux Champenois Blanc Vertus En Vieux Fombres 2015 **88**

Alexandre Bonnet Rosé des Riceys La Forêt 2017 **88**

Les Frères Mignon Coteaux Champenois Blanc 2016 **88**

Alexandre Bonnet Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Riceys La Forêt 2018 **88**

François Secondé Coteaux Champenois Blanc Sillery NV **88**

There is some volume to the fresh and correct palate. Juicy and long. **| 87**

SF | Pale straw with a watery rim; an attractive nose of *tarte tatin*, gooseberry fool, even soft chalk. Nuanced, for sure, but appealing. The palate revisits this carapace of modesty and does not appear inclined to offer much by way of additional complexity. **| 87**

JR | Sweet, spicy oak nose rather dominates the fruit, which struggles on the palate to make its presence felt. Sour finish. Not a great success, in its current form anyway. Watery finish. Drink 2020-22. **| 82**

Philipponnat Coteaux Champenois Rouge Mareuil [Pinot Noir] 2015 (12% ABV) **| 85**

EA | Deep ruby. Complex, earthy-spicy, evolving nose. Dark blueberry and blackberry fruit with vanilla, bell pepper, and allspice. Savory on the rich, velvety palate, with a tannic bite toward the end. Lots of character and a satisfying fullness. Ready, but will develop further nuances. **| 90**
SF | Ruby vermilion, color holding well. Nose still primary, dark fruit to the fore: black cherry,

raspberry, and myrtle; behind that, smoke and a hint of white pepper. This promise is somewhat compromised on the palate, which evokes soap stone and mace, the fruit undermined for whatever reason, the acidity less so, the ensemble rough-edged and unforgiving as a result. **| 86**
JR | Dark crimson with some evolution at the rim. Sour plum nose, but there is fruit here, even if it's a bit challenging. Rather dull and lifeless on the palate—a bit too old? There has been a fair amount of extraction here. A bit sour. Drink 2017-19. **| 79**

J de Telmont Coteaux Champenois Blanc Insolite [Chardonnay] 2015 (12% ABV) **| 85**

EA | Glossy lemon color. Interesting, developing nose, with fine toasty tones and a hazelnutty complexity. Distinctly Burgundian, with cool, crunchy fruit and a whiff of gunpowder. Oily, fresh palate, with very good fruity length. A very smart whole. **| 91**

SF | Reduction on the nose; a slightly vegetal meaty note does not improve on the palate; brutally raw phenolics hold sway here and look set to continue doing so. **| 79**

JR | Skin-contact nose. But pretty tight and ungenerous on the palate. I suspect this has seen better days, when the fruit compensated for the astringency. It's too old now. But it was probably pretty nice a year or two ago. Drink 2017-19. **| 84**

Alexandre Bonnet Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Riceys La Forêt [Pinot Noir] 2018 (12.5% ABV) **| 84**

EA | Deep purple color. Youthful, dark-berry nose, with soft spiciness, plums, and violets. Pronouncedly tannic on the high-acid palate. Needs time to soften. **| 85**

SF | Deep ruby, youthful, near-opaque core; impressive nose of dark cherry, chocolate, and fruits of the forest; a little spice, too. The palate is precocious, strained stalky fruit held in check, to a degree, by the relative ripeness of the fruit; chalky quite drying tannins hold the ensemble in check. This one could go either way. For better or for worse, it shows every sign of betraying exemplary typicity. **| 88**

JR | Blackish crimson though not deep at the rim. Rather raw nose. Lots of acidity. Uncharming. Overextracted? Sour finish. Drink 2022-24. **| 79**

Collet Coteaux Champenois Rouge Aÿ 2015 [Pinot Noir] (11.5% ABV) **| 83**

EA | Pale ruby color. Some pungency and VA lift to the nose that comes with cranberry fruit. Fine, smooth texture and mellow tannins on the palate, which is dominated by the acidity. **| 85**
SF | Ruby amber, rather mute of color; nose of late-picked apples, leaves and the hearthside; the palate is tiring quite quickly, the acidity most prominent and the fruit long since desiccated. **| 83**
JR | Grayish mid-garnet color. Cheesy nose. Sweet, simple fruity palate. A collection of elements rather than a delicious whole. I can't see it ever coming together gloriously. Drink 2018-22. **| 82**

Geoffroy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Cumières [Meunier] 2015 (12.5% ABV) **| 83**

EA | Pale ruby. Odd floral notes to the nose, which has a dirty chalk whiff to it. Not really pleasant. Very tart on the hard palate. Misses charm. **| 82**
SF | Ruby to brick, a slightly mentholated nose; bonfires and spruce, not unattractive per se. This promise is undermined somewhat by the stalky, sinewy palate. The fruit has lacked the concentration and vigor to last the course; the shell that remains has its own slightly perverse appeal, but the message is ultimately hollow... **| 85**
JR | Dark ruby color but not that intense. Sweet, rather simple nose. This tastes like red wine rather than anything more subtle or rewarding. Raw finish. Drink 2017-19. **| 82**

François Secondé Coteaux Champenois Blanc Sillery [Pinot Noir/Chardonnay] NV (12% ABV) **| 83**

EA | Pale lemon. Muted nose, with neutral apple, wood, and hay aromas. Youthful. Round, oily-textured mouthfeel, with the oak coming out. Still seems a bit unfinished and base-winey. **| 85**

SF | Pale Chablisienne reticence; straw-pale. A little fallow maybe; apple fruit, flint, hints of earth, the lure of what might have been nostalgic at the back of the palate, but what we have is quite good enough: a mealy, leesy foundation providing ballast and points of interest, acidity, needless to say, taut and poised. Nice clean finish, even a hint of papaya somewhere. **| 88**

JR | Deep gold. Light, savory Chardonnay aroma with a slight sour-beer edge. Pretty stiff acidity and a lack of fruit. Hard work. Astringent finish. Like my memories of Coteaux Champenois of old. It's possible it will round out with age, but my score is for how it tastes now. Drink 2021-23. **| 76**

François Secondé Coteaux Champenois Rouge Sillery [Pinot Noir/Chardonnay] NV (12% ABV) **| 83**

EA | Youthful purple color. The dark and red berry is freshly fruity with little aging complexity. Attractive cherry fruit. On the palate, it is soft and savory, with cherry essence character surfacing toward the drying finish. **| 86**

SF | Ruby red, softer at the rim; prominent legs on the side of the glass. Aromas of slightly unripe strawberry, rhubarb, and a whisper of nutmeg. The palate confirms a method along the lines of carbonic maceration; simple compote fruit and a paucity of inspiration when it comes to depth and concentration. **| 84**

JR | Smells of rope—quite interesting! Then certainly fruit on the palate, but it's of the raw rhubarb sort. Bone-dry + acidity = hard work on the part of the drinker. Perhaps it will improve and round out? Drink 2022-24. **| 79**

Cristian Senez Coteaux Champenois Rouge Réserve [Pinot Noir] NV (12% ABV) **| 83**

EA | Deeper purple color. Richly and sweetly fruity, with cassis and dark cherries. Rather youthful. Soft, silky palate, with good volume and clean fruitiness. Very correct wine, with a warm feel to it. **| 88**

SF | Ruby red, with an attractive nose of summer pudding, forest floor, and mirabelle plum; come-hither appeal, maybe lacking a cerebral twist. Palate has red berries, soapstone, a hint of white pepper and scrub. Short-termism writ large, a touch hollow at the core. **| 86**
JR | Raw, unsavory nose and a distinct lack of fruit. Drink 2018-20. **| 74**

Georges Vesselle Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy [Pinot Noir] 2009 (11.5% ABV) **| 83**

EA | Pale ruby color. Some undergrowth and mushroomy evolution on the nose. A little weak, with muted fruitiness on the nose. The palate has lost some fruit, too, leaving accentuated tannins and acidity to take over. Past its peak but hanging in there. **| 87**

SF | Russet fade, a watery rim; evolved, gamey nose; tertiary notes to the fore, delicate. Less so on the palate, which is stewed and foursquare, all intimations of the complexity of evolution dashed on the rocks of austerity. **| 84**
JR | Transparent garnet color. Not that pure on the

nose and quite painfully tart on the palate. The sort of Pinot you might come across in eastern Europe. It may well have been more convincing earlier in its life. Drink 2013-17. **| 79**

Georges Remy Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Le Chapeau de Fer [Pinot Noir] 2014 (12% ABV) **| 82**

EA | Medium-deep ruby. Pronounced nose with a slight lift to it. Animally evolution and pepperminty herbaceous notes. Rather farmyardy already. Age-mellowed soft palate, with withering fruitiness. Grippy tannins toward the finish. Already past its peak. **| 88**

SF | Russet at the rim, brick and blood at the core; then a worryingly artificial aroma, burned plastic maybe, with a dash of black pepper; the palate releases a legion of ur-faults, desiccation and antiquity key to their thankless exposition. **| 70**

JR | Quite an intense ruby hue. Sweet violets on the nose. Plus a bit of that buttery quality. Lacks a little freshness on the palate, which also has an unexpected minty nose. Buttermints? Not unpleasant, though not exactly classical. Quite long. Drink 2019-24. **| 87**

Alexandre Salmon Coteaux Champenois Rouge Les Grèves 2016 (11.5% ABV) **| 82**

EA | Pale ruby color. Sweet, evolving, red-cherry nose, with cherry-candy tones. A little tart on the lightweight palate, which has fine-grained tannins. There is lovely savory spiciness to the whole. **| 86**

SF | Gentle evolution, crimson to Victorian brick; soft at the rim; an attractive nose of hedgerow and wild strawberry, fig, loganberry, and a hint of incense. The palate is pleasantly evolved, sweet plum and red-berried fruit hints of soft spice and caramel, and then a wonderfully silky cloak of unchallengingly resolved tannins. Poised on the finish, steady as she goes. **| 89**
JR | Blackish ruby color. Very strange nose indeed! There is something distinctly non-winey about the aroma here. Raw, astringent finish and a hole on the mid-palate. Drink 2018-20. **| 72**

Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Blanc Kevri Notre Dame à Celles-lès-Condé [Chardonnay] 2019 (12% ABV) **| 82**

EA | A peachy tone to the slightly hazy looks. Sweet, straightforward, appley nose. Some Muscat-like grapey tones. Orange-wine type? Very tight palate, with biting phenolics. Misses both charm and nuances. **| 82**
SF | Somewhat miasmatic and cloudy, no recourse to the excuse of red grapes to darken the tableau. Raw, fermented aromatic, struggling to find focus let alone definition; resinous. The mood music does not shift in register thereafter. **| 75**
JR | Pale orange and slightly cloudy—skin contact? Funky, not unpleasant, nose. Definite deliberate tannin of the skin-contact sort but quite fun—so long as you drink it with food. Very *outré*, but Champagne needs to add wines like this to the mix. Appetizing, with some cooking-apple notes, but there is fruit here and no shortage of "intention". Drink 2020-24. **| 90**

Georges Vesselle Coteaux Champenois Rouge Bouzy Cuvée Véronique-Sylvie [Pinot Noir] NV (11.5% ABV) **| 81**

EA | Pale ruby. Evolving nose with tar and mushrooms over dark cherries and strawberry. There is an interesting savory quality to it. Rather soft and silky, with well-balanced acidity. **| 88**

SF | Soft ruby red, with a pale rim. Nose seems a little muffled, red fruit conspicuous mostly by its absence; heady and rather strained, stewed perhaps; the impression bemoans what is lacking rather than what is there... **| 83**

JR | Mid-blackish ruby color. Not much personality on the nose—just red wine? Pretty tart and fruitless. Not 100 percent clean. Drink 2016-18. **| 72**

J Lassalle Coteaux Champenois Rouge Chigny-les-Roses [Pinot Noir] 2014 (ABV NA) **| 80**

EA | Pale ruby color. Spicy nose with allspice and aromatic wood supporting the cherry fruitiness. On the tertiary side already. Low on fruit on the palate, which is silky but tart. **| 87**

SF | Evolved color, vermilion long since faded: brickwork that seldom gets a clean. Industrial aromatics recall cleaning fluid and spruce, more of the latter to be fair. Far from attractive, for all that. The burn of the acidity is acrid and the fruit has long since departed this stage. **| 80**

JR | Medium-intensity ruby. Smells as though there is some bacterial fault here. Fizzing on the tongue. Uncomfortably sour. Drink 2016-18. **| 72**

Tarlant Coteaux Champenois Rouge Kevri Les Echaudées à Celles-lès-Condé [Pinot Noir] 2019 (12% ABV) **| 80**

EA | Purple. Savory nose, with black pepper and allspice lining the dark-cherry and blueberry fruit. Tannic palate with high acidity. Needs time. **| 85**
SF | Vermillion, bright and lively. The nose, for all that, is somewhat anonymous: peat and raspberry maybe, Everton mints and soggy fireworks. The palate is stalky: black tea and stems pervade; fruit will have to wait its turn, by which time it may well be too late... Stark acidity is—to use the modish phrase—the takeaway here. **| 83**

JR | Purplish crimson color. Unsubtle oak on the nose. Almost painfully tart. Notably astringent. Unpleasantly raw fruit. And is there something bacterial going on here? Drink 2022-24. **| 72**

Jacques Defrance Rosé des Riceys 2010 [Pinot Noir] (12.5% ABV) **| 76**

EA | Evolving ruby color with amber hues. Oxidized aromas on the nose. (First bottle was corked.) Feels very old. Little fruit left. Faulty. **| 70**
SF | Tawny, rather thin—oxidized, alas. **| 70**
JR | Some ruby in the hue, not to say orange. Amazing that this is still around, but it's not decrepit even if there is evident evolution. It's actually pretty charming if, and only if, you like old wine. There is still some fruit, and it's well balanced with the acid and light tannin. Old rose petals? A hint of the flavors of those old aromas I tasted in the wine museum in Russia! Drink 2014-21. **| 87**