

Wine Spectator Insider

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A Members-Only, Weekly Publication

INSIDER SPECIAL REPORT: CHAMPAGNE This week's *Wine Spectator Insider* is a roundup of highlights from the beginning of *Wine Spectator's* annual Champagne tastings. It includes brut and brut blancs de blancs styles. The vintage-dated cuvées lead the pack, with several outstanding examples from the racy 2004 vintage, as well as two classic-scoring wines from Piper-Heidsieck, its 2002 and 1999 Rare. These can be found among the Hot Wines, on page 4.

Not far behind are the non-vintage Champagnes, largely made up of offerings from small growers—those producers who bottle their own Champagne and are worth seeking out, particularly for their relative value. Whether an upcoming evening calls for a bottle of bubbly or you're stocking up for the holidays, these bottlings are an excellent starting point.

—Alison Napjus and Bruce Sanderson

France Champagne

MARC HÉBRART

Brut Champagne Spécial Club 2005

93 points | \$72 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Though rich, this is vivid in profile, making it seem slimmer. Multi-grain toast, malt, orange and ginger notes pick up a honey accent as this glides to a lingering conclusion. Disgorged September 2009. Drink now through 2022.—B.S.

TAITTINGER

Brut Champagne Millésimé 2004

93 points | \$80 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A toasty Champagne, with an exotic hint of cumin spicing the wine and supporting flavors of clementine, ginger bread and graphite. There's intensity and racy acidity, all put together in a well-meshed, elegant package. Drink now through 2024.—A.N.

VILMART

Brut Champagne Coeur de Cuvée 1997

93 points | \$327/ 1.5L | NA cases made | Sparkling

A fresh, racy 1997, brimming with graphite, apricot, lemon and whole-grain toast aromas and flavors. Bracing and supple in texture, with the structure driving its intense flavors to a long, mouthwatering finish. Really youthful and promising. Drink now through 2022.—B.S.

HENRI BILLIOT & FILS

Brut Champagne Cuvée Julie NV

92 points | \$100 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Spice and whole-grain toast notes augment grapefruit, candied berry and mineral in this supple yet firm Champagne, which is vinous and complex, with a lot of character packed into its racy profile. Best from 2011 through 2016.—B.S.

BOLLINGER

Brut Champagne La Grande Année 2000

92 points | \$150 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A full, robust Champagne, delivering plenty of gingerbread, toast and citrus aromas and flavors. Balanced in an extroverted way, with a fine texture, this is approachable now. Should continue to develop. Drink now through 2020.—B.S.

CHARTOGNE-TAILLET

Brut Champagne 2002

92 points | \$60 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A linear, racy style, showing ripe flavors of peach, red apple and lemon. Despite a nutty note, this stays focused and vivid, ending with a spice and mineral aftertaste. Disgorged January 2010. Best from 2012 through 2030.—B.S.

STÉPHAN COQUILLETTE

Brut Champagne Carte d'Or NV

92 points | \$54 | 200 cases imported | Sparkling

A bold Champagne, with broad shoulders and racy acidity, displaying layers of ripe blackberry and black cherry fruit, malt and wheat toast, with hints of smoke and vanilla. Despite its power, this is well-meshed and elegant, offering much to think about with each sip. The finish is juicy and floral. Drink now through 2015.—A.N.

DIEBOLT-VALLOIS

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Fleur de Passion 2004

92 points | \$165 | 25 cases imported | Sparkling

An aromatic, spiced Champagne, boasting honeyed flavors of fig paste, candied orange peel and ginger bread. Rich but balanced by racy acidity and a spicy undertow, this shows both grace and power, with a lingering floral note on the finish. Drink now through 2019.—A.N.

PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne FLeuron 2004

92 points | \$66 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A rich, toasty blanc de blancs, with layers of biscuit, quince and candied orange peel accented by smoke and honey notes. Broad-shouldered, with firm acidity, yet retains a sleek vibrancy. Very well put together, with a long, juicy, spice-tinged finish. Drink now through 2017.—A.N.

J.M. GOBILLARD

Brut Champagne Cuvée Prestige Millésimée 2005

92 points | \$58 | 9,166 cases made | Sparkling

A rich, powerful, full-bodied bubbly, exuding peach, honey and vanilla flavors, with subtle undertones of citrus and spice. This is balanced, with a refreshing finish and fine length. Drink now through 2020.—B.S.

JEAN MILAN

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Spécial NV

92 points | \$55 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Candied berry, peach, floral and mineral aromas and flavors highlight this creamy, vibrant Champagne. Very harmonious, with a refreshing finish of lemon and ginger. Drink now through 2013.—B.S.

PERRIER-JOUËT

Brut Champagne Fleur de Champagne Cuvée Belle

Epoque 2002

92 points | \$139 | 2,000 cases imported | Sparkling

Loads of gingerbread, honey and grapefruit flavors course through this vibrant Champagne, which is medium-bodied and balanced, lingering nicely on the nutty finish. Should develop quickly. Drink now through 2024.—B.S.

POL ROGER

Brut Champagne Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill 1999

92 points | \$240 | 500 cases imported | Sparkling

Hints of nut and honey underscore flavors of lemon meringue, citrus peel, smoke and toast in this vivacious Champagne, which is driven by firm acidity, leading to a lingering, spicy finish. Drink now through 2020.—A.N.

VARNIER-FANNIERE

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne NV

92 points | \$55 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A full-throttle, malt- and whole grain-infused Champagne, yet with a creamy texture and fine balance. Russet apple, grapefruit and honey tones round out the flavor profile, with a long, toasty aftertaste. Drink now through 2012.—B.S.

VARNIER-FANNIERE

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Cuvée St.-Denis NV

92 points | \$64 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A vinous style, offering malt, honey, citrus and mineral flavors. Rich and dense in texture, with creaminess offset by lively acidity, followed by a long aftertaste of roasted nuts. Shows loads of personality. Drink now through 2014.—B.S.

VILMART

Brut Champagne Coeur de Cuvée 2001

92 points | \$138 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A distinctive Champagne, mixing sour apple, apricot and candied orange peel flavors with a pronounced undertow of peat smoke and spice. Firm and lightly chalky in texture, with a juicy finish. Drink now through 2020.—A.N.

VILMART

Brut Champagne Grand Cellier d'Or 2004

92 points | \$92 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A fresh note of acacia blossom winds through this aromatic Champagne, with honey, lemon curd, gingerbread and spiced orange. Well-integrated and refined, finishing with hints of graphite and smoke. Drink now through 2019.—A.N.

L. AUBRY FILS

Brut Champagne Ivoire & Ébène 2004

91 points | \$64 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Razor-sharp acidity shows a fresh, citrusy tone to it and structures this sleek Champagne. Hints of brioche, honeysuckle, almond paste and spice flavor the wine, mixing on the refined texture. The lightly chalky finish is mouthwatering. Disgorged March 2010. Drink now through 2019.—A.N.

HENRI BILLIOT & FILS

Brut Champagne 2004

91 points | \$68 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A firm Champagne, with vibrant acidity enlivening a core of spiced berry and cherry fruit flavors, candied citrus peel and floral notes. There's a subtlety to this wine, despite an intensity that builds toward the finish. Disgorged May 2010. Drink now through 2019.—A.N.

LA CARAVELLE

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne NV

91 points | \$40 | 175 cases imported | Sparkling

A picture of elegance and finesse, this bubbly combines lemon, apple, mineral and a touch of honey with its lithe frame. It's all beautifully put together, with a crisp finish. Drink now through 2012.—*B.S.*

CHARTOGNE-TAILLET

Brut Champagne Fiacre Tête de Cuvée 2002

91 points | \$70 | NA cases made | Sparkling

This is assertive, with bracing acidity and a chalky texture lifting the yeast, lemon and mineral flavors. Tightly wound, this has the viscosity and intensity to match food. Fine length. Disgorged April 2010. Best from 2012 through 2026.—*B.S.*

GASTON CHIQUET

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne d'Aÿ 2000

91 points | \$148/1.5L | NA cases made | Sparkling

A distinctive Champagne, aromatic and fresh, displaying Gala apple, orange blossom, honeysuckle and smoke flavors. The acidity is like a whip, very vivacious and racy, powering spice and salt notes through to the frothy finish. Drink now through 2015.—*A.N.*

DUVAL-LEROY

Brut Champagne Clos des Bouveries 2004

91 points | \$65 | 150 cases imported | Sparkling

There's a malty edge to this creamy Champagne, with flavors of raisin bread, currant and a touch of candied orange peel. The airy texture and frothy mousse create an elegant impression and bring you back for another sip, with a lightly juicy finish. Drink now through 2017.—*A.N.*

PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Sélection Belles Années NV

91 points | \$42 | NA cases made | Sparkling

An elegant Champagne, with layers of flavor including apple sauce, honey, smoke, toast and quince. Shows well-integrated acidity that provides a subtle juiciness throughout and brings you back for another sip. Drink now.—*A.N.*

J.M. GOBILLARD

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne NV

91 points | \$52 | 5,333 cases made | Sparkling

Smoke and toast notes frame this wine, with chalky acidity adding further definition. This has a tightly wound core of flavor, including hints of lemon meringue and grapefruit zest, with just a touch of an intriguing cumin note. The finish is clean and spicy. Drink now through 2012.—*A.N.*

JEAN MILAN

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Grande Réserve 1864 NV

91 points | \$84 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Flavors of candied orange peel, roast walnut and gingerbread mix in this firmly structured Champagne, delivering nervy acidity on the creamy texture. A hint of graphite runs through this, lingering on the finish. Drink now through 2012.—*A.N.*

JEAN MILAN

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Réserve NV

91 points | \$66 | NA cases made | Sparkling

A sleek Champagne, offering graphite, lemon, floral and mineral flavors. There's a precision to its profile, with a crisp, chalky feel on the mouthwatering finish. Drink now through 2013.—*B.S.*

JEAN MILAN

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Terres de Noël Vieilles Vignes Sélection 2004

91 points | \$84 | NA cases made | Sparkling

This Champagne finds a pleasant balance between the dry, chalky acidity that structures the wine and its honeyed flavors of Gala apple, yeast, pastry and clementine. Open and expressive, with a modest, graphite-edged finish. Drink now through 2012.—*A.N.*

DELAMOTTE

Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne 1999

90 points | \$95 | 375 cases imported | Sparkling

This creamy Champagne is light-bodied and subtle, blending pastry, baked apple and smoke flavors with just a touch of butterscotch candy in a well-meshed package. Smoke and graphite notes linger on the juicy finish. Drink now.—*A.N.*

DRAPPIER

Brut Champagne Grande Sendrée 2004

90 points | \$90 | 300 cases imported | Sparkling

The light, airy texture displays toasty hints of orange zest, pastry, apricot and graphite. Light-bodied, with lively acidity and a spicy finish. Drink now through 2015.—*A.N.*

PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS

Brut Chardonnay Champagne Spécial Club 2000

90 points | \$84 | NA cases made | Sparkling

Dense and tightly wound, this offers ginger, grapefruit, apple and mineral aromas and flavors. Still on the reductive, fresh side. Should develop more mature, aged notes. Best from 2012 through 2025.—*B.S.*

CHARLES HEIDSIECK

Brut Champagne 2000

90 points | \$80 | 200 cases imported | Sparkling

A mix of toast, graphite and honey flavors, all allied to an elegant frame. Vibrant and long, with a spice and mineral aftertaste and a firm, mouthwatering finish. Drink now through 2020.—*B.S.*

HOT WINES

These are the most exciting discoveries from our editors' most recent tastings, published exclusively in *Wine Spectator Insider*. They are high-scoring, low-production wines from around the world that may be difficult to find, but are worth seeking out.

PIPER-HEIDSIECK

Brut Champagne Rare 2002

95 points | \$275 | 125 cases imported | Sparkling

A classy Champagne, all about the silky texture. The Pinot Noir component shows now, with red berry and graphite flavors and a firm structure influencing the balance. Honey, toast and seashore notes complete the picture. Fine length. Best from 2012 through 2040. *From France.—B.S.*

PIPER-HEIDSIECK

Brut Champagne Rare 1999

95 points | \$275 | 150 cases imported | Sparkling

A well-toasted Champagne, with lots of smoke, brioche, lemon peel, honey, dried apricot and roasted nut flavors. Firm acidity provides a lovely freshness and framework, and it's seamlessly integrated with the flavors and refined texture. Features more nut and smoke notes on the long, lingering finish. Drink now through 2024. *From France.—A.N.*

ALFRED GRATIEN

Brut Champagne 1999

93 points | \$94 | 2,500 cases made | Sparkling

This floral Champagne boasts flavors of fruit pastry and citrus peel, but also a hint of cardamom and toasted cumin spice notes, making for a very interesting mix. Deftly put together, this is structured by the lively acidity and densely knit texture, with a vibrant, spiced finish. Drink now through 2020. *From France.—A.N.*

POL ROGER

Brut Champagne 2000

93 points | \$100 | 200 cases imported | Sparkling

An elegant version, whose silky texture meshes seamlessly with the grapefruit, apple and ginger flavors. Detailed and harmonious, with a graphite accent on the finish. Drink now through 2024. *From France.—B.S.*

WINE SPECTATOR'S TASTERS

The Most Experienced Team of Wine Journalists in the World

Wine Spectator's tasting staff includes 12 people in two offices. They work together to review more than 18,000 wines each year, more than any other publication. Together, our six senior tasters count more than 140 years of tasting experience.

We always taste wine blind in our offices in Napa and New York. This is your guarantee that our reviews are fair and objective, and that a wine's reputation or price does not influence its score. Each editor specializes in the wines of specific regions; their initials identify the taster of each wine reviewed. We score wines using the 100-point scale, explained below.

James Laube Senior editor, Napa

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: California

Kim Marcus Managing editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: Austria, Greece, Port, Portugal, Southern France

Thomas Matthews Executive editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1988. Tasting beat: New York, Spain

James Molesworth Senior editor, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1997. Tasting beat: Argentina, Bordeaux, Chile, Finger Lakes, Loire Valley, Rhône Valley, South Africa

Bruce Sanderson Tasting director, New York

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1993. Tasting beat: Burgundy, Champagne, Germany, Italy

Harvey Steiman Editor at large, San Francisco

Joined *Wine Spectator* in 1983. Tasting beat: Australia, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington

Tasting staff:

Tim Fish (California),

Alison Napjus (Alsace),

MaryAnn Worobiec (California)

Wine Spectator's 100-Point Scale

95-100	Classic
90-94	Outstanding
85-89	Very good
80-84	Good
75-79	Mediocre
50-74	Not recommended