

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

*John Gilman*

## Annual Champagne Review 2012

### **Pierre Brigandat et Fils (Channes- Côte des Bar)**

Bertrand Brigandat is the vigneron currently in charge of this small family domaine in the Côte des Bar. The Brigandat family exploits 7.5 hectares of vines here, but continues to sell off some of their production to the Grandes Marques. I only tasted a superb example of their Brut NV for this report, but it was of sufficiently impressive enough quality to make me want to taste through the whole range in the near-future. This was a very impressive non-vintage Brut and a great value that is well worth seeking out.

#### **Pierre Brigandat et Fils “Brut Tradition” NV**

This was my first taste of wines from Pierre Brigandat et Fils and the house's current release of their non-vintage Brut is stunning. The small domaine is located in the Côte des Bar, in the village of Channes and the current head of the 7.5 hectare family estate is Bertrand Brigandat. The non-vintage Brut is made up of one hundred percent pinot noir, though it makes no mention of Blanc de Noirs on the label. It hails primarily from the 2005 vintage, with a bit more than twenty percent of the blend made up of reserve wines. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of apple, grapefruit, smoky overtones, warm biscuits, beautifully complex soil tones and a nice touch of citrus peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is focused, full-bodied and youthfully complex, with lovely mid-palate depth, ripe, crisp acids, very elegant mousse, superb balance and excellent length and grip on the youthful and quite classy finish. While quite tasty today, I would opt for tucking this lovely wine in the cellar for another year and really let it blossom. This is superb juice and a great value! 2013-2025+.

**92+.**

### **Michel Lorient (Festigny- Vallée de la Marne)**

The Lorient family can trace its history as vignerons in Festigny back to 1675, but given the lower prices grapes here in the Marne Valley fetched in the 1930s, the Lorient family began estate bottling some of their production at this time. The scion of the family at this time was Germain Lorient, whose son, Henri Lorient and his wife Jeanne began to bottle the entire production from the family's four hectares of vineyards in the early 1950s. Michel Lorient, their son, took over direction of the domaine in 1979 and was joined by his daughter in 2008. Today, the estate encompasses seven hectares of vines, primarily in Festigny and several surrounding villages. Festigny, on the south bank of the Marne is pinot meunier territory and this is primarily what the Lorient family grows, with eighty percent of their production dedicated to this grape and the family making some absolutely stunning wines from this variety. These are some of the most elegant and seamless Grower Champagnes that I have had the pleasure to taste and are well worth searching out in the market.

#### **Michel Lorient “Sélection” Extra Brut NV**

As is true of all the different cuvées which I tasted from Michel Lorient, the “Sélection” Extra Brut is a very refined bottle of bubbly, jumping from the glass in a delicate and classy aromatic blend of tart pear, lemon zest, gentle smokiness, warm bread, complex minerality and a touch of iris blossom in the upper register (from pinot meunier in the blend). On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and supremely elegant, with frothy mousse, crisp acids and superb focus and balance on the very long and dancing finish. This is a lovely and almost ethereal example of Extra Brut from a very exciting new (at least to me) grower. 2012-2025. **91.**

#### **Michel Lorient Blanc de Noirs “Brut Réserve” NV**

Michel Lorient's non-vintage Blanc de Noirs is comprised entirely of pinot meunier, and is a young, but lovely wine in the making. The deep and youthfully vibrant nose jumps from the glass in a mélange of white peach, beautifully refined soil tones, a hint of passion fruit, warm bread, gentle smokiness and the very gently musky floral tones of pinot meunier. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully light on its feet, with fine mid-palate depth, frothy mousse, crisp acids and lovely focus and grip on the perfectly balanced and elegant finish. This is a lovely wine in the making, and while it is delicious today, a couple of years in the cellar will really pay dividends. 2012-2025. **91+.**

#### **Michel Lorient Brut Rosé NV**

The non-vintage Michel Lorient Brut Rosé is a lovely, fairly light-colored Rosé that shows off the inherent delicacy of a wine with plenty of pinot meunier influence. The deep and very classy nose wafts from the glass in a complex mélange of blood orange, sweet cranberry, wheat bread, complex minerality, a touch of dried roses and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with young, zesty acids, delicate mousse and lovely length and grip on the frothy and dancing finish. As is the case with all the Lorient bottlings that I tasted, there is a lovely lightness of step on the palate for this wine that is most impressive. 2012-2022+. **91.**

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### **2004 Michel Lorient Blanc de Blancs Brut Millésime**

The 2004 Michel Lorient Blanc de Blancs is a lovely wine that shows a big of influence from some barrel fermentation. The deep, complex and very classy nose offers up a complex mélange of apple, pear, brioche, a complex base of soil, orange zest and a touch of creosote from the barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and youthfully elegant, with fine midpalate depth, classy mousse, bright acids and very good length and grip on the complex and focused finish. There is a bit more wood on the backend of the palate than there is on the nose, and some tasters may find this a bit of a distraction, but there is no denying that the wine is beautifully poised and complex. I would give this a couple of years of bottle age to allow it to better integrate its shadow of oak influence. Good juice that I would rate even higher if the wood could recede even further into the background from the outset. 2014-2030. **91**.

### **2006 Michel Lorient “Pinot Meunier Vieilles Vignes” Brut Millésime**

A year ago a sommelier at one of the top restaurants in New York mentioned to me at a Champagne tasting (the same one that this year caused the slight delay in the release of this issue, as it is a major tasting of new releases from some of the very finest grower Champagne producers in the region) that I really should try this particular bottling from Michel Lorient. Happily, I came across my notes from last year’s tasting while researching another article for this issue, so I was able to track down Monsieur Lorient’s US importer and receive samples of the entire Lorient portfolio for this feature. The 2006 old vine bottling of pinot meunier from Michel Lorient is a superb bottle, offering up the house’s supremely elegant style on both the nose and palate. The bouquet is a deep and utterly refined mélange of apple, bread dough, a touch of nuttiness, beautifully complex soil tones, a smoky topnote and even a hint of spiced meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully delineated, with a lovely core of fruit, superb, elegant mousse, crisp acids and a very long, classy and youthful finish. This is high class juice that will improve with further bottle age. 2014-2030. **92+**.

### **Jean Velut Brut NV**

This was my first tasting of the wines of Jean Velut and I found them very good in terms of aromatic and flavor complexity, but like several other Grower Champagnes out there, the mousse was a tad on the coarse side and kept my score down just a bit. The bouquet on Monsieur Velut’s non-vintage Brut is certainly superb, offering up a very expressive mélange of apple, pear, complex soil tones, brioche and a touch of pastry cream in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and quite soil-driven, with lovely focus and balance, a fine core, and very good grip and length on the slightly coarse finish. For those who do not mind trading a bit of coarseness on the palate for superb complexity to the base wines, then add at least a few points to my score, as there is a lot of personality to be found here in the glass. 2012-2025. **88**.

### **Jean Velut Blanc de Blancs Brut NV**

I was very impressed by the quality of the Jean Velut non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. The excellent nose jumps from the glass in a classy blend of apple, tangerine, warm bread, lovely minerality, a touch of fresh nutmeg and a topnote of apple blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very elegant, with a fine core of fruit, lovely, pinpoint bubbles, crisp acids and excellent, nascent complexity on the very long and transparent finish. This is still quite a young wine and a few years in the cellar will really pay rewards. Impressive juice. 2013-2028+. **91+**.

### **Jean Velut Brut Rosé NV**

Jean Velut’s non-vintage Brut Rosé is quite a dark cherry red in color. The nose is deeppitched and shows a fair bit of still pinot noir influence in its blend of cherries, blood orange, cinnamon stick, wheat toast and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite “winey” in personality, with a lovely core, sound mousse, crisp acids and very good focus and balance on the long and soil-driven finish. I like this wine very much, but it is a tad short on complexity in comparison to several other top Brut Rosés, and it is only this fairly modest complexity that keeps the score down a bit. It is a wine that is certainly better at the table than sipping as an aperitif, but there is a lot to like here as far as the wine goes. 2012-2020. **88**.

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### **2006 D. Henriët-Bazin “Cuvée Marie-Amélie” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Premier Cru)**

I was very impressed with the quality of the Henriët-Bazin wines that I tasted in preparation for this article. The house has been producing its own wines now for five generations, with Marie-Noëlle Rainon-Henriët now in charge of this fine small producer. The east-facing vineyards for their Blanc de Blancs Cuvée Marie-Amélie all hail from the village of Villers-Marmery on the Montagne de Reims, with the vines all in excess of fifty years of age.

This wine from Henriët-Bazin does not go through malolactic fermentation. The 2006 is outstanding, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of pear, apple, brioche, chalky minerality, lemon peel and a gentle toastiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely, elegant mousse, fine mid-palate depth, zesty acids and excellent focus on the long and classy finish. This is a lovely bottle of Blanc de Blancs that is drinking well out of the blocks and should delight for a good dozen years or more. 2012-2025+. **93.**

### **2006 D. Henriët-Bazin “Carte d’Or” Brut Millésime (Premier Cru)**

The Carte d’Or bottling from Madame Rainon-Henriët is a blend of sixty percent pinot noir and forty percent chardonnay, all hailing from vineyards the family owns in the grand cru (for pinot noir) villages of Verzenay and Verzy. Because the house uses chardonnay from these villages as well in the cuvée, the wine is listed as a Premier Cru bottling. In contrast to the house’s fine Blanc de Blancs, “Cuvée Marie Amélie”, the Carte d’Or does go through full malo. The 2006 Carte d’Or is outstanding, offering up a deep and complex nose of apple, gentle spice tones, warm bread, very complex minerality, orange peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and beautifully balanced, with frothy mousse, bright acids and excellent focus and grip on the complex and very long finish. Fine, fine juice. 2012-2030. **93+**

### ***Other Sparkling***

#### **Clotilde Davenne Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Extra NV**

Clotilde Davenne is a full-time winemaker at a well-known Chablis estate, but she moonlights on her small, 8.5 hectare Crémant de Bourgogne project in the Yonne. Many of her vines are quite old, and it shows in the intensity of flavor in her wines. Her non-vintage Extra Brut is really very fine, offering up a very Champagne-like nose of green apple, pink grapefruit, a beautifully complex base of limestone, warm bread and a touch of lime peel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and bouncy, with a fine core of fruit, impressive complexity, frothy mousse (which is decidedly more elegant than some Grower Champagnes I sampled for this report!) and a long, crisp and soil-driven finish. I would be very surprised if a wine this well-balanced did not age extremely well. This is truly outstanding sparkling wine and an absolute steal! 2012-2020. **91.**

#### **Clotilde Davenne Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Extra Rosé NV**

Clotilde Davenne’s non-vintage Crémant de Bourgogne Brut Extra Rosé is every bit as lovely as her straight Brut Extra bottling. The wine is a pale and pretty salmon color and the nose offers up a complex and very vibrant mélange of melon, white cherries, gentle smoky tones, orange peel, chalky soil tones and biscuits. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still youthfully snappy, with a lovely core of fruit, elegant mousse, fine mineral drive on the backend and excellent length and grip on the long and still quite youthful finish. Whereas Madame Davenne’s Brut Extra is a lovely drink right from the start, I would be strongly inclined to give this superb Rosé bottling a year or two in the cellar to really unwind, as this wine has superb potential, but there is a touch of youthful backend bitterness currently on display here that is best waited out with a bit of bottle age. This is very serious juice! 2013-2020. **90+.**