

## **WORKSHEET FORTY-TWO**     *Small, Proud Kingdoms*

A fascinating line-up of top champagnes is listed for this tasting. Compare and contrast, describe and score. Choose a theme – perhaps one producer only – or one bottle only. Place low-dosage champagne and Chardonnay first in a line-up, with age before youth. Let the aromas speak before you taste. Return to this tasting again and again, learning about each producer’s style in practice. Select appropriate worksheets from the Appendix.

### **SERGE MATHIEU**

Hallmarks of the range: light, tastefully fruity, fresh, balanced, with elegant style. There is finely drawn minerality, even in the rosé – which is particularly attractive. All the champagne is supple, straightforward, round without heaviness. There seems to be a lot of Chardonnay, which some members of the press say is ‘coarse’. They are insulting nearby Chablis, which has the same soil structure, by writing such a broad-brush criticism. Judge for yourselves.

Note: Disgorgement dates are on the corks, which is not much use when buying in store but there are plans afoot to rectify this.



Stony soil, ‘Le Bressoire’, Avirey-Lingey

#### **Serge Mathieu ‘Tradition’ Pur Pinot Brut Blanc de Noirs NV**

*100% Pinot Noir, a blend of two harvests*

Dosage is 8.6–9.5 g/L.

#### **Serge Mathieu Brut Prestige NV**

*33–70% Chardonnay, 30–67% Chardonnay, a blend of two harvests*

Dosage is 8.6–9.5 g/L.

#### **Serge Mathieu Brut Select**

*80% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir*

Grapes are mainly from one harvest, but the wine is not vintaged despite extended lees ageing. Dosage is 8.6 g/L.

#### **Serge Mathieu Brut Millésime Blanc de Noirs**

*100% Pinot Noir*

Dosage is 6 g/L.

#### **Serge Mathieu Brut Rosé NV**

*10% Chardonnay, 90% Pinot Noir*

Made by the addition method. It is a blend of two harvests. Dosage is 9.5 g/L.

### **Serge Mathieu Cuvée Extra Brut Blanc de Noirs**

*100% Pinot Noir*

A blend of two harvests. Dosage is 5 g/L.

### **TARLANT**

Hallmarks of the range: minerality, fruit, concentration, power, length. Each cuvée is quite individual, with smoke and spice a highlight in some. The very long lees ageing is an outstanding feature. Many of the cuvées suit fine food.

#### **Tarlant Zéro Brut Nature NV**

*Approximately 33% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 33% Meunier*

Fruit sourced from Oeuilly, Boursault, Celles-les-Condé and St.-Agnan. Stainless steel tank fermentation, with 50% reserve wines aged in barrel. The composition is from mixed *terroirs* and – a hard test for any winemaker – is a very drinkable zero dosage champagne. Oysters love it, too.

#### **Tarlant Rosé Zéro Brut Nature NV**

*85–90% Chardonnay, 10–15% Pinot Noir*

Vinified as red wine in barrel, from mixed *terroirs*, a blend of two years minimum, with reserve wines aged in barrel. A fruity, aperitif style.

#### **Tarlant Tradition Brut NV**

*Exact percentages not disclosed, but Pinot Noir dominant with a lesser amount of Meunier and a little Chardonnay*

A blend from mixed *terroirs*, with first fermentation in stainless steel combined with barrel-aged reserve wines. Dosage is 6 g/L.

#### **Tarlant Brut Réserve NV**

*Approximately 33% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 33% Meunier*

Grape from mixed *terroirs*, with first fermentation in stainless steel blended with barrel-aged reserve wines. Dosage is 6 g/L.

#### **Tarlant Prestige Extra-Brut Vintage**

*65–90% Chardonnay, 10–35% Pinot Noir*

Grapes are from old vines in the sandy Marne Valley limestone *lieux-dits* of ‘L’Enclume’ and ‘La Savoyarde’ in the amphitheatre of vines overlooking the River Marne at Oeuilly, and from similar *terroir*, but due south, at ‘Les Marguiners’ in St.-Agnan. Stainless steel and barrel fermentation, no MLF. Dosage is 4–5 g/L.

#### **Tarlant Prestige Extra-Brut Rosé Vintage**

*85–88% Chardonnay, 12–15% Pinot Noir*

The Chardonnay is stainless steel fermented; the Pinot Noir is vinified as red wine in barrel. Grapes originate from selected *lieux-dits* in Oeuilly and the Valley of the Surmelin, matched by soil type; no MLF. Dosage is 3–4 g/L.

**Tarlant ‘La Vigne d’Antan’ Extra-Brut**

*100% Chardonnay*

Ungrafted Chardonnay from very old vines in Les Sables, west-facing on the Oeuilly amphitheatre. This is what chardonnay tasted like before phylloxera. Barrel fermented with *bâtonnage* as required until May following harvest. Most years, this wine is vintage, but occasionally the blend contains some wine stored in barrel from the prior year. Time on lees can run well into the second decade. Dosage is around 2 g/L.

**Tarlant ‘La Vigne d’Or’ Blanc de Meuniers Extra-Brut Vintage**

*100% Meunier*

Chalky clay soils of Pierre de Bellevue from old north-facing vines planted after the Second World War in 1947, 100% barrel fermented with regular *bâtonnage* until May following the harvest, with very long lees time following secondary fermentation. Dosage is 1–4 g/L.

**Tarlant ‘Cuvée Louis’ Extra-Brut**

*50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir*

From very old vines planted before 1950 in the vineyard of ‘Les Crayons’ at Oeuilly, a blend of three vintages, 100% barrel fermented, no MLF, *bâtonnage*, aged in barrel. Dosage is 2–3 g/L.

**Tarlant ‘La Vigne Royale’ Vintage**

*100% Pinot Noir*

From Celles-les-Condé’s ‘Mocque Tonneau’ vineyard. Dosage is 3 g/L.

**Tarlant BAM!**

*Approximately 67% Petit Meslier, 17% Arbanne, 17% Pinot Blanc*

A slap-face name, from the winemaker who has also made champagne named Disco Bitch.<sup>1</sup> The Petit Meslier is from ‘Les Sables’ vineyard at Oeuilly and ‘Four à Chaux’ in the Valley of the Surlin. Vinified in barrel, zero dosage.

**MARGUET PÈRE & FILS**

Hallmarks of the range: rich, complex, nuanced aromas with oxidative influence, flavourful, supple and fleshy, vinous and generous, while maintaining elegance, freshness and balance; very long on the palate, in an easy-drinking style which is versatile with food. Reliable year after year.

**Marguet Blanc de Noirs Premier Cru**

*70–78% Pinot Noir (from Ambonnay and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ), 22–30% Meunier (from Cumières and Rilly-la-Montagne)*

15% barrel-aged reserves from a solera 2004–09. Two years on lees. Dosage is 5–7 g/L.

**Marguet Réserve Grand Cru**

*37% Chardonnay (from Ambonnay), 63% Pinot Noir (from Ambonnay and Bouzy)*

30% barrel-aged reserves from a solera 2004–08. Three years on lees. Dosage is 4–7 g/L.

**Marguet Rosé Grand Cru**

*58% Chardonnay, 42% Pinot Noir (saignée, from Ambonnay and Bouzy)*  
13% barrel-aged reserves from a solera 2004–09. Two years on lees. Dosage is 6 g/L.

**Marguet Vintage Grand Cru**

*38% Chardonnay, 62% Pinot Noir (from Ambonnay)*  
Five years on lees. Dosage is 4 g/L.



An intent seeker of wisdom and truth – Benoît Marguet

**Marguet Vintage Rosé Grand Cru**

*84% Chardonnay, 16% Pinot Noir*  
Five years on lees. Dosage is 4.8 g/L.

**Marguet ‘Les Crayères’ Vintage Grand Cru**

*70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir*  
Five years on lees. Dosage is 3.5 g/L.

**Marguet ‘Sapience’ Vintage Premier Cru**

*67% Chardonnay, 33% Meunier*  
Made in collaboration with Hervé Jestin, whose name frequently appears in this book, from grapes supplied by three prominent organic/biodynamic growers: Lahaye (Bouzy), Laval (Cumières) and Léclapart (Trépail). Interestingly, the capsule cover is flimsy violet-coloured paper, as Marguet wanted to display the cork and its cap, but the rules did not permit it. Seven years on lees. Dosage is 3 g/L.

## AGRAPART

Hallmarks of the range: concentration of ripe fruit, purity, precision, minerality, low dosage, great texture, sufficiently aged, long finish, elegance, delicacy, vivacity, finesse, complexity ... no artifice.

### **Agrapart ‘Le 7 Crus’**

Chardonnay from each of the seven areas owned, 50% of current harvest plus 50% from preceding year, 25% aged in barrel on fine lees until May following the harvest, then blended and bottled. Spends three years on lees. Dosage is 7–10 g/L, depending on the year.

### **Agrapart ‘Terroirs’ Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru**

*100% Chardonnay*

Grapes from Avize, Oger, Cramant and Oiry, a blend of 50% of the current harvest plus 50% from preceding year, 25% aged in barrel on fine lees until May following the harvest, then blended and bottled. Spends four years on lees. Dosage is 5–7 g/L, depending on the year.

### **Agrapart ‘Complantée’ Extra Brut**

*Quantities of each grape not known*

From the ‘La Fosse’ vineyard in Avize, old-fashioned planting of mixed vines of Pinot Noir, Meunier, Pinot Blanc, Meslier and Chardonnay, the grapes all pressed together regardless of variety, barrel-fermented and bottled in May following harvest, spends four years on lees. ‘Illuminates the papillae of the tongue,’ says Pascal Agrapart, meaning that we experience taste sensations of sweet, sour, salt and bitterness as part of the pleasure. Dosage is 5 g/L.



Grapes exposed for ripening on mixed vines for ‘Complantée’ Extra Brut, ‘La Fosse’ vineyard, Avize. Note the white grapes in the row with the black.

### **Agrapart ‘Minéral’ Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Vintage**

*100% Chardonnay*

Chardonnay from the calcareous topsoils of Avize vineyard ‘Chamboutons’ and Cramant’s ‘Les Bionnes’; barrel-aged on fine lees until May following harvest, spends five years on lees. Dosage is 1–4 g/L, depending on the season. Expect piercing elegance, power and concentration. In the mouth, expect salty minerality with a touch of bitters. Very convincing and pure champagne. Allow aeration time.

### **Agrapart ‘L’Avizoise’ Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Vintage**

*100% Chardonnay*

From old Chardonnay planted before 1960 in steep Avize vineyards ‘Les Robards’ and ‘Voie d’Épernay’ right up near the tree line, grouped together in this cuvée because the *terroir* for both *lieux-dits* is clay on deep chalk. Barrel-fermented and barrel-aged, bottled on cork in May following harvest, the champagne spends 5 years on lees. Dosage is 4 g/L. All the power hallmarks, with a touch of smoke floating on a rich palate. A long-standing favourite.

### **Agrapart ‘Vénus’ Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Vintage**

*100% Chardonnay*

Named in memory of the Agraparts’ favourite old horse. Chardonnay from Avize vines planted well before 1960 from another section of ‘La Fosse’, a vineyard with a ditch in the middle on the relatively flat part of Avize, on the Cramant side of the village. Clay one end, calcareous soil the other end, but all on chalk. Barrel-fermented, then bottled in May following the harvest; spends 5 years on lees. Ripe fruit richness, autolytic complexity, gripping finish. No dosage.

### **Agrapart ‘Expérience’**

*100% Chardonnay*

Made experimentally in a very small batch with Chardonnay of one year from Avize’s ‘Les Robards’ and Cramant’s ‘Bionnes’ (thus in a sense a cross between the ‘Minéral’ and ‘L’Avizoise’ cuvées). Natural yeasts were used in both fermentations, and the champagne spent 3 years on lees. No dosage.

Text and photos except Benoît Marguet © Kaaren Palmer

Photo of Benoît Marguet © Vic Pugatschew

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<sup>i</sup> Reported by Richard Juhlin, *A Scent of Champagne* e-book, Skyhorse Publishing, 2013, location 8233.