

WORKSHEET FORTY-FOUR Blind Tasting, Matching with Food, and Other Games

Ideas for this practice session will give you much food for thought in planning tasting sessions for the future in addition to providing you with blind tasting prompt sheets. Of course, it should always be remembered that what you consider to be good champagne is ‘between you and the bottle’, as Michel Drappier would say.¹ We don’t all like the same thing, or have the same favourite, whether it be art, offal, tea or champagne.

It’s good to practise a blind tasting alone as it hones your skills. Just don’t begin swallowing too soon, or enjoyment will take over! The more practice you have, the quicker it becomes to identify the components in the glass. Try using a larger wine glass, as in one of the earliest chapters, as it will make the aromas more evident. At the end of your tasting session, smell the aromas in the empty glass, uninterrupted by alcohol. Perhaps you’ll have something about those aromas to add to your notes, and perhaps you’ll have something more to state in your conclusions about the wine. How was the experience? Did the environment influence your enjoyment?

Next time you have a formal dinner, try champagne with each course and note the complementary nature of the food–wine match. You will be surprised many times by the enhanced enjoyment, whatever the ‘rules’ are for food–wine matching.

Following are a set of suggested champagnes for blind tastings. Descriptions of each are provided, in an easy first step towards successful blind tasting. Select an appropriate number of bottles, or a single half bottle. Have an accomplice mask and number the bottles or, better still, as bottle shape sometimes provides a clue (e.g., Ruinart), have the tastings poured in another room.



Sometimes, it seems that there’s no end to the exploration of Champagne

EXERCISE ONE

Tackle the tasting by working through the blind tasting prompter first. Return to look at the descriptions. Try to match the aromas and taste for each champagne with one from the set of descriptions. Link the number on the bottle to its matching description. Regardless of whether a secretive accomplice asks you to taste one or six numbered bottles, select from the six descriptions. Good luck!

- Diebolt-Vallois Blanc de Blancs Prestige Brut NV
- Georges Laval Brut Nature Cumières Premier Cru NV
- Laherte Frères Les 7 Extra Brut NV
- Didier-Ducos Absolu Meunier NV
- Tsarine Premium Brut NV
- Canard-Duchêne ‘Cuvée Léonie’ NV

	NUMBER
<p>Diebolt-Vallois Blanc de Blancs Prestige Brut NV <i>100% Chardonnay from Cramant, Chouilly and Le Mesnil</i></p> <p>Reserve wines aged 2–3 years in 40 hl casks. Rich, complex, round. Tiny, lively, green-hued bubbles, intense lemon and mineral nose opens to baked apple; crisp and fresh, balanced, with a long lean finish. Opens nicely in the glass revealing multi layers. A blend of three harvests. Dosage is 6–8 g/L.</p>	
<p>Georges Laval Brut Nature Cumières Premier Cru NV <i>50% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 20% Meunier</i></p> <p>Powerful aromas from ripe, certified biodynamic and organic fruit; barrel fermented with natural yeasts and without chaptalisation, some bâtonnage is employed to assist creaminess. A blend of three harvests from steep south-facing Cumières, aged on lees 2–4 years depending on the harvest. Opens with complex aromas, the palate is rich and full, with a chalky gripping finish. No dosage.</p>	
<p>Laherte Frères Les 7 Extra Brut NV <i>18% Chardonnay, 14% Pinot Noir, 18% Meunier, plus the old varieties of Fromenteau (10%), Arbanne (8%), Pinot Blanc (17%) and Petit Meslier (15%)</i></p> <p>From a single mixed plot of seven varieties of champagne grapes planted in 2003. Fermentation in old Burgundy barrels with natural yeast, usually no MLF, light lees is retained, regular bâtonnage in barrel over 6 months. The wine is then blended with 40% reserve wines from a solera, which has been maintained since the creation of the first cuvée. Very restrained aromas until after aeration, when mixed fruit aromas, light brioche and hints of smoke appear; salty and mineral in the mouth; young, very crisp and spritzy; dry and gripping finish. Dosage < 4 g/L.</p>	
<p>Didier-Ducos Absolu Meunier NV <i>100% Meunier</i></p> <p>From three parcels of different ages, planted by three different generations of the family. Light lemon colour, fine and vigorous mousse, aromas of apple, pear, white peach, bread and minerals, lightly creamy texture, precise structure and lengthy slightly spicy minerality on the finish. Elegantly agreeable. Dosage 8g/L.</p>	
<p>Tsarine Premium Brut NV <i>33% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 33% Meunier approximately</i></p> <p>Green-gold, delicate bead, fresh citrus aromas with some florals, discreet orange zest and quince touches. Fresh, elegant aperitif style. Dosage 6–12g/L.</p>	

<p>Canard-Duchêne ‘Cuvée Léonie’ Brut NV</p>	
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25% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir, 25% Meunier

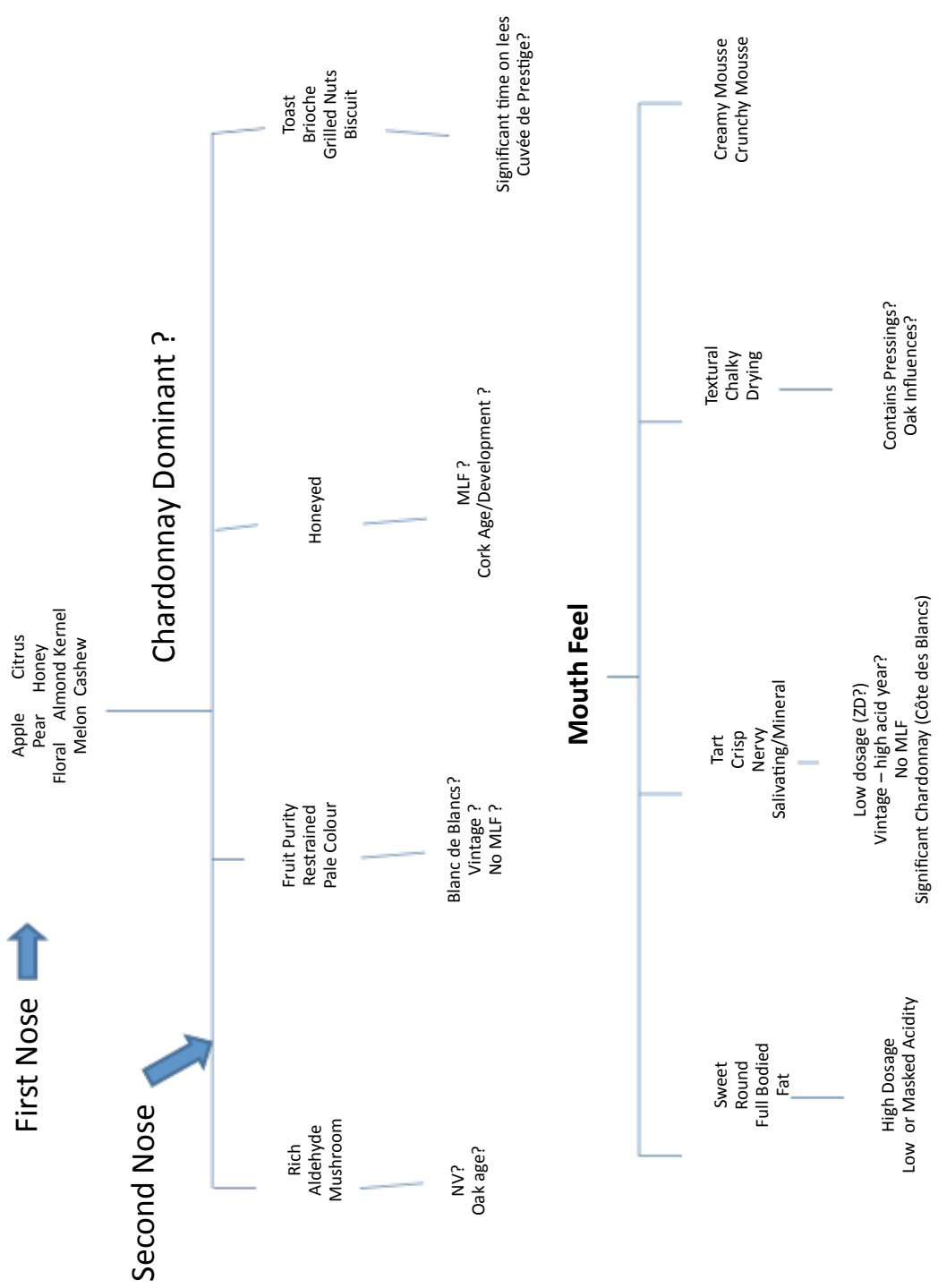
Pale gold, with aromas of yellow orchard and exotic fruits, dried flowers, gingerbread notes; gently spiced candied fruits show on aeration; toasty, mature and complex. 25% reserve wines; dosage around 10g/L.

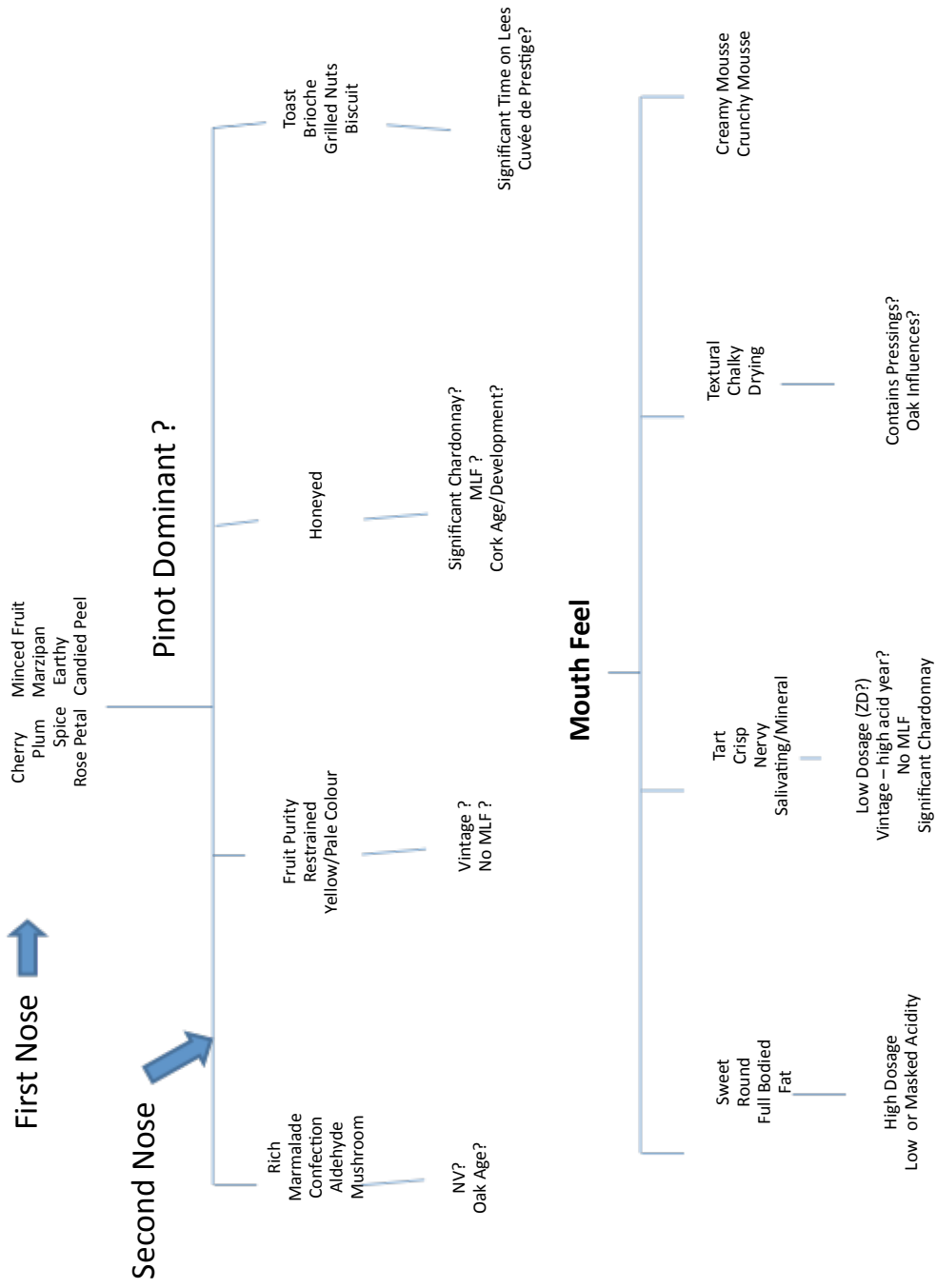
EXERCISE TWO

Mask Chardonnay-dominant or Pinot Noir–dominant champagne and follow the flow charts on pages 4–5 as a prompter for deciding exactly what you are tasting.

EXERCISE THREE

Mask any bottle/s of champagne and describe what is being tasted with the help of the spreadsheet following the flow charts.





Blind Tasting Prompter
 NV blend
 Vintage
 Chardonnay
 Pinot Noir
 Meunier

<p>Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pale Green-gold Very effervescent ☆ or ☆ Pale, lemon-yellow Young cuvée ☆ or ☆ Golden, Reddish, Copper, Bronze colour deeper with age or wood ferment 	<p>3. Tertiary (from age, or reserve wines)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Honey, walnuts, butter, dried quince, toffee, coffee, tropical fruit, praline, gingerbread, marzipan, almond bread, hazelnuts, nougat, toast, sherry ● Forest floor, fruit cake, dried fruit, citrus peel, tobacco, truffle, smoke, sherry, grilled nuts, game, mushroom, just-cooked vegetable, spices ● Dried apricots, honeycomb, beeswax 	<p>Flavour (see Aromas)</p> <p>Salinity (Le Mesnil) Vinosity (lees time) Richness, concentration (wood, bâtonnage)</p> <p>Length</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Long ● carried by acidity, or ● ☆ carried by power ☆ good, but shorter 	<p>Other Comments</p> <p>☆ Long Lees Time ☆ Grilled, toasted, nutty notes, butter, cheese, caramel</p> <p>MLF ☆ Creamy, butter, cheese</p> <p>Wood Influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leather, pencil lead, struck match ● Mineral, brine, cigar box, bouillon, smoke, vanilla, butter, nuts, spices, coffee, chocolate, butterscotch, coconut, sherry
<p>Aromas</p> <p>None too cold, needs air, or cork taint</p> <p>Unpleasant wine fault</p> <p>1. Primary (derived from fruit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fresh, floral, blossoms, oystershell, mineral, apples, pears, citrus, grapefruit, cut hay, mint, melon ● Fruity (Blend of 2/3 grape varieties) ● Berries, plum, cherry, violets, roses orange, apple, mango ● Candy, spice, stone fruits <p>2. Secondary (from winemaking)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brioche, pastries, cooked fruits, nuts ● Biscuit, savoury, crystallised or cooked fruit, licorice, grilled almonds ● Dough, bread, honeycomb 	<p>Taste</p> <p>Attack Freshness, purity</p> <p>Structure, ☆ Intensity or Gr Cru ● Weight Very crisp and incisive - aperitif, no MLF Soft, creamy - bâtonnage, MLF, time on lees</p> <p>Balance Acidity/ Sweetness, high acid - salivating ☆ Pronounced acidity</p> <p>Texture Creamy, silky (lees time, bâtonnage) Chalky (northern Champagne ●) Astringent, drying (too much wood) Tannin (rosé, wood) Rough (cork taint)</p>	<p>Conclusions</p> <p>Deposit at bottom of glass - v. old Points of difference - house style ☆ Unfolding linearity, complexity Prestige - elegance, complexity, balance, length if young. ● Marked acidity, good aromas ● Marked elegance</p>	<p>General impression, quality, food match</p>

Text, photo and blind tasting prompter © Kaaren Palmer
 Flow charts for varietal qualities © Kate Laurie

ⁱ Letter from Champagne Drappier No. 37, Spring and Summer 2010.

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