

CHAMPAGNE REGION

A few of the most exciting wines in the world come from this region.

Presentation

Champagne wine, as we know it today, was created by a monk called Dom Perignon during the 17th century. He managed to understand the typical fermentation, mix the grape varieties, invent the cork and add sugar which dissolves the carbonic gas in the wine.

Summer and fall are quite sunny. The grapes in Champagne benefit from a lot of light. The soil made of chalk reflects the sunlight into the grapes.

The chalky soil is ideal for Champagne wine. It absorbs water during winter and gives it back to the vine's roots during summer. The other way around, it absorbs heat during summer to give it back during winter.

Winemakers use **3 types of grape** to produce Champagne.

- Chardonnay is a white grape. Chardonnay is the typical grape used in great Burgundy white wines. It provides freshness and elegance.

- Pinot Noir is a red grape traditionally used in Burgundy to make their famous red wines. It brings fruitiness and aromas.

- (Pinot) Meunier is a red grape mostly used in Champagne. Meunier adds roundness to the blend, producing supple and fruity wines that tend to age more rapidly.

Weather is quite special in Champagne. Winter is cool, summer and fall are sunny.

The average temperature in the region is around 11 °C and the average number of sunshine hours per year is around 1680, rising to 2100 hours in certain years (like 2003.)

Champagne is the most up north wine region in France..

1/ Geography of Champagne:

Champagne region is located east of Paris, along the Marne, Vesle and Aisne rivers.

Champagne spreads over 5 districts: Marne, Aube, Aisne, Haute-Marne and Seine et Marne
The heartland of the Champagne region is Marne which can be separated into 3 areas: Montagne de Reims, Vallée de la Marne and Côte des Blancs.

- **Montagne de Reims**: south of Reims city, where the best P N Noir grow
- **Côte des Blancs**: south of Epernay city, where the best Chardonnay grow
- **Vallée de la Marne**: west of Epernay city, where the best Meunier grow
- **Côte des Bar**: south east of The Champagne area, in the Aube department (Pinot Noir)

We may also add :

- In the northern part of the vineyard: **Massif de St Thierry, Vallée de l'Ardre**: Meunier+
- Between the Côte des Blancs and Côte des Bar : **Côte de Sézanne** and **Vignoble de Montgueux** (close to Troyes) : Chardonnay.

It is one of the main reasons why winemakers blend grapes from these different terroirs to come up with the best grape juices.

The soil is chalky which is what is needed for Champagne wine.

2/ Wines in Champagne:

Traditional still wines in Champagne

Rosé des Riceys is a rosé and was one of the favourite wine of King Louis the XIV. It is one of the best rosés in the country. Winemakers use Pinot Noir.

Wines from **Coteaux Champenois** are usually red but there are some white and a few rosés. The most famous is the red wine from Bouzy..

Other types of Champagne

Blanc de Blancs:

This Champagne is made only with Chardonnay (white grape). There are only a few bottles made and there are quite expensive. The wine is more delicate than regular Champagne.

Blanc de Noirs:

This Champagne is made with black grapes, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Most of the time, there is only Pinot Noir. Very few bottles are available, even less than Blanc de blancs.

Champagne Rosé:

Pink Champagne is made with black grapes (rosé de saignée) and sometimes the best red wines are added to a traditional white wines (blend rosé).

3/ (SUMARIZE OF) CHAMPAGNE WINE MAKING

1: Alcoholic fermentation: after harvesting, pressing and clarification

Conversion of natural sugar into alcohol, the grape juice turns into still wine: it's realized in different tanks concerning each grape-variety.

The MLF (malolactic fermentation) may follow.

2: Assemblage: blending wines : the blends.

Liquids from different harvests, from different areas and grapes are blend together.

3 : Bottling

The Champagne is bottled with yeast and sugar (liqueur de triage), hermetically sealed by a "bidule" and corked with a temporary crown cap.

4 : Second fermentation

The yeasts turn sugar into alcohol and CO₂. The carbon dioxide (CO₂) cannot escape from the bottle and is dissolved in the Champagne, forming the bubbles.

5 : Maturation on lees

Champagne bottles are stored horizontally in natural cool and dark chalk cellar for 15 months to 3 years (Vintaged wine), at least.

6 : Riddling and Disgorgement

During maturation, the winemaker rotates the bottles every day to remove the lees. The purpose of disgorgement is to eject the sediments that has collected in the neck.

7 : Dosage:

At the end of the aging period, the winemaker removes the yeast deposit from the bottle and adds a solution of wine and sugar. The addition of sugar, according to the different wines, allows the "Champenois" to create a scale of 'sweetness' from extra-dry to sweet.

4/ About Champagne

A Champagne bottle should mature in a cellar for one to two years.

There are several different kinds of Champagne according to the quantity of residual sugar: Demi-sec (semi-dry), Brut (dry), the most common Champagne, Extra brut...

5/ Tasting Champagne:

Champagne is traditionally served in a typical glass called flute.

Champagne is always served cold and chilled. But not too cold, otherwise the wine is not able to release its aromas.

A non-vintage Champagne should be drunk at 8 °C and a vintage at 10-12° °C.

6/ Wine Classification in Champagne:

In the European Union, only wines coming from the Champagne region can wear the name Champagne on the label.

In the area, 319 established villages, known as "crus", produce Champagne.

Included in the 319, 17 crus are classified as "grands crus" and 44 more as "premiers crus". These two mentions are found on the label.

There are basically two different kinds of Champagne.

Vintage: the bottle of Champagne wears a vintage year on the label. However they are not made every year but only when the wine is good enough. They are the best Champagne specially Tête de Cuvée or Premium vintage such as the most famous Dom Pérignon or Grande Dame...

Non-vintage: they make more than 80 percent of all Champagne bottles. Winemakers mix different harvests from different places. They mature in cellar for 1 year at least before going into the market.

There are 3 AOC (wine grade classification) in the region:

- Champagne (sparkling wine)
- Coteaux Champenois (traditional still wine)
- Rosé des Riceys (one of the best French still rosé)

7/ Champagne and food

Champagne is usually served alone as festive wine. Therefore nothing distracts the taster from exploring the aromas of the wine.

However Champagne is a perfect match with many meals and dishes such as:

- Foie gras
- Smoked salmon
- Lobster in white sauce
- Oysters
- Caviar

Cheeses in Champagne: all from cow's milk: Langres, Chaource, Brie de Meaux.