

VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS CHAMPAGNE

Tom Stevenson, Michael Edwards and Andrew Jefford...

Veuve Fourny Blanc de Blancs de Vertus 2008

ME | Slightly softer feel and touch; less mineral, more licorice, a signal of maturity. **AJ** | Pale gold; a fine, steady mousse. Nutty, buttery; the "country maid" style of blanc de blancs. Relatively concentrated, with a full frontal, broad-beamed style, but plenty of ground stone beneath. I like this: relaxed and affable, but with some secondary marrow to it; satisfying and sustained. The fruit perfumes the finish, too. Just a hint of sherry, but not enough to spoil the palate in any way. **TS** | A brilliant balance between high acids, great energy, and finesse of fruit. Can easily be drunk now but will age gracefully over the long term.

Pierre Gimonnet Oenophile Extra Brut 2008

ME | Light yellow, ripe hue; citrus and a touch of pear and yellow peach. Sensuous, almost ready, amicable. **AJ** | Pale gold and gentle, steady mousse. Unwieldy aromatic profile: fabrics, green plum, perhaps a little honeysuckle. The fruit qualities here are a little tenuous and light, so the dosage is evident, but it's not cloying; simple, graceful, pretty enough. A touch sherbetty, even. You'd begin to want something a little deeper and saupier after the first glass. **TS** | Very fruity, fresh, and soft. So 2009! Easy to drink now, but will also evolve beautifully.

Jacqueson Avize Champ Cail Extra Brut 2004

ME | Fine, subtle gently evolving Welsh gold; inviting harmonious citrus-scale aromas, open, feebly but elegant, with something in reserve, with admirable tenacity; palate complete confirmation of nose, lovely balance of now candied lemon fruit, velvet texture and long, quite defined finish. More than excellent. **AJ** | Steady mousse in this pale gold wine. Fresh, light, and powdery as far as it goes; not hugely aromatic. Vinous, full, correct but the fruit is slightly raw and engenderous. Nonetheless, it's a pleasant glass of blanc de blancs and the gratifying mineral-salt notes qualify the finish. **TS** | A lovely balance of freshness and mature fruit, with textbook creaminess more a texture than an aroma. Classically very dry in true extra-brut style. Slightly oxidative within perfectly acceptable bounds.

Lanson Noble Cuvée de Lanson Blanc de Blancs Brut 2000

ME | Toasty and developed, but still fresh and vital. **AJ** | Full gold; sustained mousse. A little gruff and straightforward for a wine of this age. Lively, fresh, frank, and full. Very Chardonnay, too. Satisfying without being seductive. **TS** | Fresh, crisp, and clean, with mellow, toasty fruit and fine acidity.

Joseph Perrier Blanc de Blancs 2006

ME | Another fine example of 2006's virtues. Fresh, ripe, expressive fruit, with a paper clip of acidity and a lovely velvet texture in the mouth. Harmony and balance. **AJ** | Full yellow-gold, with a steady mousse. Soft pear scents, yet the aromas lack focus and poise. Vivid, exuberant, amply contoured palate, yet the lick of caramelly dosage is evident and slightly overwhelms the vitality of the vintage fruit. Attractive but not intricate. **TS** | Lovely balance of fresh aromatics and yeast-complexed fruit on the palate. Has elegance, vigor, and finesse.

Phillipponnat Grand Blanc Brut LV Long Vieillessement 1988

AJ | Pale to mid-gold; evanescent mousse. Well preserved alongside some of its peers, though a little bit still and raw in character, a little taut and green and austere. Some of the others are almost too evolved, but with this wine's aroma you wonder why it hasn't done more. On the palate, it is green, taut, and tight. Youthful, yes; concentrated, yes; lots of incision, but a slightly green sherbetty character and lack of generosity in the final analysis. **TS** | So pale with such pure, juicy peach. I cannot understand why this Champagne has not aged, has not even mellowed!

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2005

ME | Raw, edgy acidity, somewhat out of balance with the ripe fruit of '05. Fair, but no more than that. **AJ** | Attractive green-gold; fine mousse. There's almost a slight gunflint reductive quality here; very tight and sappy. The palate, too, almost has a Sauvignon-like, vegetal quality, which suggests shaded canopies. How would the ordinary drinker find this wine? Vital and attractive, but it still reminds me as much of Marlborough as of Le Mesnil. The dosage seems very sweet alongside this very green, vital fruit, so for me this wine hasn't yet achieved full harmony. Puzzling but good in its own way. **TS** | Very lightly toasty, fine and delicious in the most graceful of ways, with great acidity. This is what finesse is all about.

Veuve Fourny Blanc de Blancs de Vertus 2007

ME | Similar in style to (Ayala Blanc de Blancs 2007) but less intense. **AJ** | Pale to mid-gold. Yeasty, earthy, mally, even a touch of white chocolate. Very full of the diagnostic '07 ripeness here; plump and round. True to the vintage, to such an extent that it hasn't made the most classical blanc de blancs, but it is a lovely Chardonnay-based Champagne. Good depth, snow, and finishing vinosity. The fruit is outstandingly high quality. Very good, though drink sooner rather than later. **TS** | A touch oxidative on the nose, but the fruit is clean and reasonably fresh.



Paul Georg Premier Cru Blanc de Blancs 2005 Brut

ME | Similar to (JL Vergnon Résonance Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru 2005); nice, fresh, balance of minerals, green fruits, and a fresh balance. **AJ** | Pale green-gold, with a very fine, sustained mousse that outlasts its flight peers. This is another 2005 that, like (Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 2005), has an aroma whose green, vegetal, shaded canopy notes recall New Zealand rather than Champagne; again you might guess it has some Sauvignon in it. On the palate, too, it is quite severely acidic, with some more of that pea-pod greenness. The sweetness of a conventional dosage level just tastes wrong to me, with that green note and that aggressive acidity; very sweet-and-sour. **TS** | Exploding with autolytic length with finesse!

Lanoble Collection Rare 1982 Brut

AJ | Full gold; languid mousse. Rather weighty and caramelized nose. Bright, vivid, chunky, and full in the mouth, with a crushed-stone finish; excellent concentration. Still full of life, though I wish the aromatic profile was just a little fresher. **TS** | Amazing freshness on the palate for a 32-year-old Champagne, but we are left with only the remnants of what was once a fine wine.

Artés & Co Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs 2002

ME | Even yellow, gold lights, hint of green; acidity and dryness on nose; quite a fine-down, linear,

and athletic palate; pure; a more reductive style of winemaking—still young-tasting. **AJ** | Pale gold; fine mousse. Fresh orchard fruits on a breezy day; lightly lactic, banana hint behind. Soundedly constructed, medium-weight palate built around a core of that same apple-and-pear fruit. Not particularly chalky or stony on the finish, and the fruits are more satisfying than exquisite. But it's a workmanlike effort, and I'd happily slip away. **TS** | Rich and tasty, with very fresh fruit, for a 12-year-old Champagne. Technically the criticism must be its medium-sized bubbles, but these should get finer with more post-dégorgement aging. I'd love to restate this disgorgement in 12 or 24 months.



Deutz Blanc de Blancs 1993

AJ | Full yellow-gold; evanescent mousse. Soft, languid, wainuty scents. Intense, long, vivid palate combining the wainuty fullness of the aromatic profile with relatively sharp-elbowed acidity; the two don't quite come together with classic great-vintage felicity, but this is still a Champagne in good fettle. **TS** | Toffee-mellowed fruit. Typical for aging of this vintage now.

Fleury Cépages Blancs Extra Brut 2005

ME | Deepish color from a hot late season; aromas rather disjointed, a smack of raw acidity out of balance with summative fruit; big and bisterous on the palate, grabs you unawares, but the wine is quite clumsy, without nuance, bread, or class. **AJ** | Very full gold; steady mousse. Vinous, structured, secondary fruit scents: real wine. Not hugely articulate, but I get a sense of fine raw materials harvested à point. On the palate, by contrast, the Champagne is a little loose and pastoral: sheaves of straw in a broad frame, and the vinous fruit has almost upped and scurpered. A nice drink, in fact; and there is acidity to lend support; but those for whom Champagne should be taut and tight and tightly laced will need to look elsewhere. This is ripe, open, "mineral," secondary. There's a very attractive wild-hawthorn floral note at the very end. I like it a lot.

TS | A soft-hay, straw-like aroma. Fine now, but will go oxidative. Drink up.

Pierre Gimonnet Spécial Club 2005

ME | Again, brisk acidity, and a straightforward fruitiness. Not complex. **AJ** | Pale to mid-gold; delicate mousse. Delicate, powdery scents of considerable refinement. On the palate, it's a little less refined, with tangy incision and a brisk, firm finish; the dosage is evident. **TS** | A nice, fresh, elegant, fresh, light but intense blanc de blancs with a pristine finish, designed for the table.

Larmandier-Bernier Vieille Vigne de Cramant Grand Cru Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs 2007

ME | An attractive à point Champagne from a ripe end season. Green/gold; fresh citrus ceding to candied fruits, especially lemon, quite seductive—tangy, plithy fruit with a welcome touch of phenolics, perhaps from the skins, to make up for the slight lack of acidity. **AJ** | Pale to mid-gold; lively mousse. Dry stony notes, and something almost a little oniony, as if 5% Sauvignon had crept into the blend. The palate is clean and sinewy, but the fruit quality lacks some finesse; the flavors dissipate relatively swiftly, and the overall sense is of a wine whose raw materials weren't quite the very finest. But I'd love a glass of it at the right moment; it is still a sound, elegant, well-crafted blanc de blancs, and the fruits hold well to the finish, where they counterpoint and perfume the mineral-salt notes. **TS** | Very, very rich style and a touch fat with a hint of VA. Has a lot going for it, but unfortunately it's too much!

Jean Millan Torres de Noÿ Vieilles Vignes Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs 2009

ME | A lime-like, lemon hue, youthful; still in the citrus scale of aromas, an agreeable herbal scent; compact but pure and healthy mouthfeel, a touch pinched just now, very young but promising. **AJ** | Pale gold; lazy mousse. Rather a neutral aroma, even given its youth, as if it was made from Pinot Grigio rather than Chardonnay. Correct but unexciting palate. Gentle mineral salts on the finish provide the main interest; the fruit remains rather featureless and uneventful. **TS** | Extremely fresh and floral aromas, so energetic and vital, yet fine and elegant, with lime blossom fruit on the finish. Excellent vintage and an excellent wine.

Palmer & Co Blanc de Blancs 2007

ME | Clear yellow, green lights; even, flowing mousse; slightly earthy nose (near full maturity); quite overt acidity, as if acidified; crisp and straight, a little one-dimensional. **AJ** | Pale gold with v. steady mousse. Lots on

the aromas here; plenty of white mayblossom; plenty of ground stone; plenty of pounded almond. Fragrant and enticing, with no coarse or false notes. After a while in the glass, it gets a little heavier and more pollen-like, even honeyed. A lovely palate of generosity yet complexity, too. The fruit is soft, downy, poised lemon with foamy crème anglaise; there's also a stony intricacy and length to it. The acidity is vivid, prominent, but beautifully rounded and fruit-laden. The flowers persist on the palate, despite its overall wealth. It has everything except a symphonic, multi-dimensional finish, and there's a slight question mark over palate development in the glass. **TS** | Extraordinarily fruity aroma for a Champagne; nothing technically wrong; it has lots going for it but is just a bit one-dimensional.

Louis Roederer Blanc de Blancs Brut 2007

AJ | Pale gold; delicate mousse. Quietly breezy, with suggestions of pollen and hay, but a little reserved just now, as if it had a green skin over it that needs stripping away; needs more time to achieve articulation. Almost slightly reduced, if that were possible. Intense, vivid, and lively on the palate, acid-structured, but richly acidic, with lots of viscosity and pungency beginning to articulate itself around that acidity. A very good wine, which again needs a little longer to resolve itself and show at its best. **TS** | Lots of fruit and lots of character, but lacks finesse in the finish.



JL Vergnon Résonance Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru 2005

ME | This has a nice balance of minerality, pure fruit, and an enduring freshness. Well made. **AJ** | Pale to mid-gold; evanescent mousse. Generalized orchard scents. Tangy, forceful palate with a vivid, structured finish. The prominent acidity of 2005 required a very delicate hand with the dosage if it was to be seamlessly incorporated, and in this wine, as in others, there is a contrast between the hard acid profile and the dosage sweetness. But this is still a wine of substance and depth, and the fresh fruit is attractive. **TS** | Deep and echoing throughout its length, but it lacks finesse.