

VEUVE FOURNY & FILS

(Verv Fawny e Feess)

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CHAMPAGNE
V^{ve} FOURNY & FILS
une Famille, un Clos, un Premier Cru

When a tiny plot on pure chalk in the coveted 'Le Mont Ferré' hillsides of the northern end of Vertus towards Le Mesnil-sur-Oger came up for sale in the summer of 2011, offers poured in from big houses, but the grower chose the brothers Emmanuel and Charles-Henry Fourny as its new custodians. The offer was indicative of the respect with which the young fifth-generation growers manage some of the finest terroirs in Vertus. Their location on Rue du Mesnil on the northern edge of Vertus is a clue to their success, with vineyards capturing the more mineral side of the premier cru village neighbouring the grand cru of Le Mesnil-sur-Oger itself.

WHEN I FIRST VISITED JUST FOUR WEEKS BEFORE THE scheduled start of vintage 2011, Rue du Mesnil was completely closed off. Veuve Fourny's winery was totally gutted and swarming with construction workers. Emmanuel Fourny emerged from an early-morning meeting with his builders.

'We are grateful for the cooler weather,' he said, 'because there's no chance our new winery would be ready for an early vintage!'

It was the beginning of a grand new era for a family who has tended vineyards at the southern end of the Côte des Blancs since 1856 and made its own champagne since 1931. There's one of the most expressive champagnes of the character of their beloved village of Vertus.

VINEYARD FOCUS

Veuve Fourny's focus remains resolutely and exclusively on Vertus, apart from a small parcel in Cramant. 'I like to express the terroir of Vertus and show that you can have a lot of expression with just one village,' says Emmanuel, who has a self-confessed obsession with purity and precision.

There's no better place in the Côte des Blancs than the sunny, south-east-oriented slopes of Vertus for him to bottle his vision. 'Vertus gives us better expression of fruit than the neighbouring grand crus of Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Oger,' he explains. 'The chardonnay here has more of a pinot noir richness to it, which enables us to create blends exclusively from chardonnay that can be complete.'

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The Champagne Guide

TYSON STELZER

THE CHAMPAGNE GUIDE

2014-2015

Praise for the 2011 edition
'EXCELLENT ... THOROUGHLY RECOMMENDED.' — JANCIS ROBINSON

The east-facing slopes of the village nurture chardonnay of fresh definition, while its warmer south-facing aspects are among the only vineyards of the Côte des Blancs planted to pinot noir. The brothers own 8.7 hectares, predominantly on the mineral hillside of 'Le Mont Ferré' towards Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, where thin soils bless vines with easy access to chalk, and a south-east aspect imparts greater fruit expression than the more rounded style of south-facing slopes.

They manage a further 3.6 hectares of family vines now owned by their cousins, supplemented with almost eight hectares managed according to an organic philosophy, most of which were originally part of the family estate. The Fournys work closely with their growers, whom they describe as 'small, serious and interested in separation of plots for precision winemaking.' These are mostly young growers and friends, who are invited back to taste their plots after vinification. In all, the brothers manage the vineyards and harvests for a sizeable 60% of the grapes they purchase. A total of 20 hectares provides for an annual production of 200,000 bottles.

Estate vines now average a hefty 45 years of age. 'Vines over 30 years transform the minerality of the chalk into the salty minerality of the wine, which we feel is very important,' Emmanuel explains. Such old vines ensure that yields are very low for Champagne, averaging below 60hL/hectare, less than two-thirds of Champagne's average, 'to produce a balance in our wines.' Green harvests are conducted in high-yielding years like 2004, when 30% of the crop was dropped.

Veuve Fourny balances a resolute commitment to the environment with a realistic awareness of the limitations of viticulture in a climate as marginal as this. Vineyard practice is essentially organic, with the exception of sprays, which are used when necessary. Grasses are cultivated in the mid-rows of one-third of vineyards, another third is cultivated to bare soil, and a further third without herbicide, with a goal to eliminate herbicide across all vineyards. Insect breeding is controlled using pheromones, canopy management is used instead of chemicals to control botrytis, and composting is used in place of fertiliser.

A normal spray regime is used to manage mildew, particularly in years like 2012, when it saved the crop. 'We like the organic philosophy, but we don't want to sacrifice our grapes to mildew,' Emmanuel says, referring to a trial the brothers conducted shortly after returning to the family estate in the mid-90s. Synthetic chemicals were forsaken in two parcels, but the wild spread of mildew necessitated weekly sprays with copper sulphate — permitted under biodynamics

despite its toxicity and detrimental effect on the soil and vine growth. Much of the crop was lost and they returned to non-toxic synthetic products.

On the same site as the house on Rue du Mesnil, Clos Faubourg Notre-Dame was purchased by the brothers' grandfather in 1920, but it was only in 1990 that Emmanuel and Charles-Henry proposed to their mother that it be bottled separately.

With just 40 centimetres of soil before the chalk, they consider it a good plot, 'not better, but different, holding its freshness as a long-ageing style.' Its micro-climate is protected by the enclosure. This plot is the source of their flagship cuvée. The brothers' grandmother built a house on part of the clos in 1965, which they removed in 2012 after she passed away. They have replanted this part of the vineyard to chardonnay, though won't use the fruit in this wine until the vines have reached 12 years of age.

MINIMAL INTERVENTION WINEMAKING

The brothers are excited about the potential of their new winemaking facility to capture greater detail from every parcel. Previously, the press house was in a different location to the winery. Tanks and winemaking equipment that had gradually amassed over the years were not well suited to small-batch winemaking, so they boldly decided to sell it all and create the new winery from scratch. A huge investment for a small company, and all the more impressive with no imperative to increase production.

Charles-Henry was initially sceptical about the outlay, preferring to see the investment poured into more vineyards. When I met him in Brisbane a few months later, I asked whether they had completed the facility in time for vintage. 'Not quite,' he said. 'It was very distressing! But we managed, and we really needed it this year because it allowed us to separate every single parcel for the first time. The new winery is completely adaptive to the size of the plots, giving us greater precision in the details. It will help us make a more precise expression of each place, so you can expect our wines to be finer in three years' time!'

The 60 plots from which the brothers source are quite distinct, and a year later he showed me 2012 vins clairs that revealed that even parcels just 150 metres apart can show significant diversity. These can now be kept separate for the first time, thanks to a small press that runs 24 hours a day during vintage, and tanks to keep 20 blends, compared with just 12 previously.

Fourny's philosophy of respect and minimal intervention in the vineyards applies equally in the winery, an insulated building built from stone from northern

Burgundy and wood from the nearby Vosges. Glass is utilised to capture natural light, all waste water is recycled on the gardens, and a natural cooling system pulls air in when it's cooler outside.

To preserve purity, only the first pressings are used, and the tailles are sold. Minimal sulphur is used as a preservative, but never so low that wines are at risk from oxidation. Malolactic fermentation is used selectively, so as to maintain tension in each cuvée, with an average of about three-quarters of parcels completing malolactic. Wines are aged on lees with bâtonnage for 6–8 months after primary fermentation, and aged in bottle between 2.5 and 9 years. The purity of the house style permits refreshingly low dosages, never more than 6g/L, from grape liqueur rather than sugar.

Emmanuel learnt the craft of barrel fermentation with bâtonnage in Burgundy, and this has been a key element of the house style since he commenced in 1990. 'I don't like oxidative champagne, so I don't want to be extremist with wood,' he says. The goal is not to impart the taste of wood, but rather to create fresh, focused and textured wines. 'Micro-oxygenation in barrels enhances the minerality of the soil,' Emmanuel explains.

New barrels are purchased from Burgundy and used for ageing a rich resource of some 200 reserve wines. A preference is given to small, 208-litre barrels to keep small plots separate and provide a balance of surface area and volume. Across the estate, 25% of parcels are fermented in old barrels aged 5–15 years, and most cuvées are blended with more citrus-accented parcels from tanks.

This thoughtful approach produces wines that display sensitive oak influence, imparting great resilience and long-ageing potential.

Since 2006, all Veuve Fourny wines have been sealed with Mytrik DIAM closures. A five-year trial of DIAM and natural cork revealed DIAM-sealed bottles to be consistent and fresh, with pure fruit, while those under natural cork were more evolved, and 'each bottle had its own personality'. The letter of reply when a corked bottle is returned has not been sent out once since the change was made. Emmanuel refers to natural cork as 'Russian Roulette' and regards DIAM as a revolution, crucial for upholding the freshness and purity of the house.

Disgorgement dates are printed on back labels for markets that request this, including the US, Japan, Australia and China. 'More and more people consider champagne like they do table wine,' Charles-Henry explains. 'Our customers keep champagne in their cellars and need to keep track of it.'

Demand for Veuve Fourny has put supply on allocation in every market, with Cuvée R and Rosé sold out for six months of 2013. The hope is to increase the bottle age of Grande Réserve and Blanc de Blancs from 2.5 years to 3–4 years, but this will take time to achieve, as these cuvées comprise 60% of production.

There is no goal to increase production in spite of these imperatives, even with the new cuverie operational and increased vineyard resources from the 2011 acquisition. 'Our goal is to grow the quality, not the volume, continuing to focus on the vineyards and the winery,' says Emmanuel. 'It depends on whether your goal in life is money or pleasure. My goal is to be able to host tastings and dinners in Japan and Australia and for people to say, "Your wines are wonderful!" That's the goal for me.'

It's a goal the brothers are capably translating into the bottle. The pristine champagnes of Veuve Fourny look more pure, precise and fresh with every release.

VEUVE FOURNY & FILS CUVÉE GRANDE RÉSERVE PREMIER CRU VERTUS BRUT NV • \$\$

94 points • DISGORGED MAY 2012 • TASTED IN VERTUS AND BRISBANE

60% 2009, 40% 2008 and 2007; 80% chardonnay, 20% pinot noir; average vine age 42 years; 75% malolactic fermentation; reserve wines aged in small oak barrels aged 4–15 years; aged in bottle at least 2.5 years; 6g/L dosage; DIAM closure

Fourny captures the soft voice of the wonderfully textured, frothy, salty minerality of Vertus from its very first cuvée, a beach-fresh aperitif of high-noon brightness. A lively lift of lemon blossom and concentrated drive of lemon, grapefruit and pristine white peach declare the chardonnay signature of the house. Pinot noir brings up the rear with its expansive depth of tangy white cherries and figs, while barrel-aged reserves contribute a spicy, toasty dimension.



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VEUVE FOURNY & FILS CUVÉE BLANC DE BLANCS VERTUS PREMIER CRU NV • \$\$

94 points • DISGORGED JUNE 2012 • TASTED IN VERTUS AND BRISBANE

80% 2009, 20% 2008 and 2007; 100% Vertus; majority from 'Le Mont-Ferré' vineyard; average vine age 42 years; reserve wines aged in small oak barrels aged 4–15 years; 75% malolactic fermentation; aged in bottle at least 2.5 years; 6g/L dosage; DIAM closure

Fourny's mandate of purity and precision shimmers in lemon zest, grapefruit pith, fresh pear, crunchy white peach and granny smith apple of soap-powder brightness. Pristine fruit expression, wonderful concentration and refinement are upheld at every moment, propelled by the texture and depth of barrel-aged reserves, adding hints of roast nuts and a suggestion of anise. A long, soft, salty mineral finish speaks clearly of the terroir of Vertus.



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VEUVE FOURNY & FILS CUVÉE BLANC DE BLANCS VERTUS PREMIER CRU VINTAGE EXTRA BRUT 2006 • \$\$

95 points • DISGORGED JANUARY 2012 • TASTED IN VERTUS AND BRISBANE

Always the same single-plot Les Barilliers, in the heart of Vertus near Le Mesnil-sur-Oger; vinified in tanks; 75% malolactic fermentation; aged 6 years in bottle; 4g/L dosage; DIAM closure

An invigorating vintage Fourny that brilliantly contrasts zesty tension, generous expression and awe-inspiring persistence. Purity is retained in glorious grapefruit, white peach and lemon, with oak sitting neatly in the background, drawing out suggestions of gingerbread biscuits and mixed spice, propelling fruit upwards and driving all-pervading mineral texture long into the finish, flickering with intriguing notes of licorice, which the Fournys say are characteristic of the chalk minerality of Vertus as it ages. These will build as it matures over many years to come.



VEUVE FOURNY & FILS CUVÉE BLANC DE BLANCS VERTUS PREMIER CRU BRUT NATURE NV • \$\$

94 points • DISGORGED JANUARY 2012 • TASTED IN VERTUS

80% 2009, 20% 2008 and 2007; low-yielding vines of 50–56hL/ha, about half of Champagne's average; predominantly from 1950s vines in Le Mont-Ferré; harvested later and with higher concentration; vinified and aged in tanks and oak barrels on lees; zero dosage; DIAM closure

Under the command of old vines, the chalk soils of the Le Mont-Ferré hark more to the thundering grand crus to their north than to the more fruity Fourny crus around them, and without the interruption of dosage, the strength of strong, salt-infused mineral texture is pronounced. Fourny's fanatical attention to ripe fruit from low-yielding old vines is declared in soaring precision of fresh lemons, crunchy nashi pears and a note of honey. A subtle tweak of barrel-aged reserves adds complexity of gingerbread biscuits and brioche, culminating in a crescendo of mineral texture, resonating with great soils tapped by deep roots. If only every brut nature were as purposefully crafted in the vineyard as this.



VEUVE FOURNY & FILS CUVÉE R DE VVE FOURNY & FILS VERTUS EXTRA BRUT NV • \$\$

95 points • DISGORGED APRIL 2012 • TASTED IN VERTUS AND BRISBANE

2008 (aged 1 year in old oak) and 2007 (aged 2 years in old oak); 90% chardonnay, 10% pinot noir; predominantly from Les Barilliers, in the heart of Vertus; average vine age 42 years; fully fermented in small oak barrels aged 4–15 years; bâtonnage; aged 4 years in bottle; 3g/L dosage; DIAM closure

The honed restraint of Fourny's pristine fruit, meeting the ravishing complexity of old oak and swirling, toasting minerality makes for a thrilling display. Fermentation in old oak barrels amplifies salty minerality drawn from the thin soils of the north of Vertus near Le Mesnil-sur-Oger by grand old vines. The exemplary freshness of 2008 overlays its textural backbone with pitch-perfect lemon, grapefruit and golden delicious apple. It's at once creamy and taut, with high-tensile acidity contrasting low dosage and the softening influence of barrel maturation. Carefully crafted old oak cranks things up a notch from Fourny's other non-vintage cuvées, building a gentle, buttery smoothness to the palate, and depth of custard apple, toast, even hints of pine needles. Give it time for oak and acidity to relax.



VEUVE FOURNY & FILS ROSÉ VERTUS PREMIER CRU BRUT NV • \$\$

92 points • TASTED IN VERTUS

100% 2009; 71% chardonnay, 20% blanc de noirs, 9% red wine from long-macerated, ripe Vertus pinot noir; 70–80% malolactic fermentation; 6g/L dosage; DIAM closure

Fourny's rosé philosophy is to retain the structure, finesse and tension of the house in a wine of rounded fruit by tweaking blanc de blancs with just a touch of pinot noir red wine. In an attempt to link the two, a little blanc de noirs has been introduced for the first time this year. The result is not as beguiling as the 2008, but nonetheless a soft, elegant, complex and balanced rosé of medium salmon-crimson hue, with gentle red berry fruits, notes of tangelo and wood spice, a soft, creamy mouthfeel and long finish.



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VEUVE FOURNY & FILS CUVÉE DU CLOS FG NOTRE DAME PREMIER CRU VERTUS EXTRA BRUT 2002 • \$\$\$\$

95 points • DISGORGED MARCH 2012 • TASTED IN VERTUS AND BRISBANE

100% chardonnay; 100% vinified and aged for 9 months on lees in oak barrels aged 5–6 years; full malolactic fermentation; 3g/L dosage; DIAM closure; just 1604 bottles

Lock up the cellar and throw away the key: Clos Faubourg Notre Dame always needs a very long time to come together, and the outstanding 2002 takes this imperative to new extremes. Its acidity is unnerveing, its salty chalk mineral structure well scaffolded, its oak support confident and its persistence disarming. In energy, drive and sheer fruit presence, this wine's dimensions transcend even its season, elevated to extremes rarely seen in Champagne outside vintages of veritable 1996 proportions. Honed, taut lemon zest and pure white peach unravel to powerful depths of fig, wild honey and more than a decade of toast, butter and roast nuts. It needs years to uncoil and when it does finally emerge, drink it slowly from large glasses at white wine temperature. In such limited supply, it sold out from the estate in less than two months.



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