

The Bluffs
Food & Wine
gazette

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A publication of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society



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THE CHAMPAGNE ISSUE, VOLUME II.

I was jazzed about the idea of an all Champagne dinner. Even though Champagne has the versatility to be served throughout a meal, it is rarely done. I myself have only experienced it a few times. But it was a great way to learn about the various nuances of the bubbly. The best way to learn about a wine is to serve a single grape variety or blend rather than completely dissimilar. That way you begin to pick out the subtleties and the variances of any given wines. For example, if you are trying to learn about Cabernet Sauvignon, compare it to other Cabernet Sauvignons, not to Syrah, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and the like, all in the same tasting. V. Mertz Manager Matt Brown did a superb job of guiding us through eight bubblys. Thanks to Steve and Patti Hipple for passing along the idea they learned about at an IWFS Festival.

Continuing our Champagne theme, Diane and Gary Forristall toured the Champagne region for two days in 2013. Author Diane describes touring some of the famous houses, such as Taittinger and G.H. Mumms, some of the history and surrounding areas. She also includes an account of how Champagne is cleared of sediment so it comes out clean and then is dosaged with sugar to determine sweetness. Merci to Diane for this Note From The Board.

I've taken an excerpt from John Fischer's book *The Evaluation of Wine A Comprehensive Guide to the Art of Wine Tasting* to again remind everyone how extraordinary Champagne is. The take home ideas are the importance of the mousse, or bubble stream, and the high acidity of Champagne. These two ideas are key to your understanding of Champagne. John also discusses what foods are poor choices, and what are good. Give it a read.

Tom Murnan

Cover: Bronze water fountain on main staircase to Domaine Carneros, utilizing the double ram (Carneros) heads, symbol of the domaine. Domaine Carneros is owned by the French Champagne Grand Marque Taittinger.







EVENT REPORT:

ALL CHAMPAGNE DINNER
AT V. MERTZ

BY TOM MURNAN

THERE WAS QUITE A bit of excitement for this one. An all Champagne dinner? Most people have never experienced Champagne with every course. Curiosity was the order of the evening. Fortunately, Matt Brown, Level 3 Sommelier, was on hand to provide education. Plus, Omaha Magazine provided us with just the Champagne portions of the May 2017 Bluffs Gazette. You could also deduce the enthusiasm by the number of attendees. Fifty one people attended, which included 8 guests. All wines were Non Vintage. All the wines came from V. Mertz or were special ordered.

Quaffing started us off with a glass of **Louis Roederer Brut Premier**, a fine ambassador of what was to come. This was no lesser wine, as sometimes the quaffers can be. No hors d'oeuvres were offered. Our first course began after we all came to table. Two different kinds of oysters were offered in this **Oyster & Champagne** course, along with three different kinds of Champagne.

Matt Brown started our education right away. "Champagne is not just for celebrations. It has the versatility to be used with many dishes. Plus, we do not usually have the opportunity

to drink different kinds of Champagne side by side. Different kinds of grape varieties, different producers, different sweetness levels, different styles of producers and different areas of Champagne will all be explored. This first course is designed to show the difference of grape selection. Every bottle of Champagne will have a **two letter code** on it. There are four different codes that they can use that refers to the style of the producer. Most of the bottles tonight will be **NM**, or **Négociant Manipulant**. This means they buy grapes from a multitude of producers and vineyards to make a house style. They do not own their own vineyards, they own some of them, but they are more concerned with producing a consistent style every vintage in and out. That's why these are the most famous houses, and why we wanted to start with it.

"We are doing a classic pairing with these three wines. Taste each wine before trying the oysters. Then taste while eating the oyster too. Wine number 1 is **Ruinart Blanc de Blancs**. Ruinart is a very famous house, and this is the wine that defines them. They are famous for their Chardonnay. Ruinart was the first house

in Champagne to officially export wine outside the region of Champagne. In 1729 King Louis XV **allowed Champagne to be put into glass bottles**, so that's when Champagne officially started. Ruinart helped to define Champagne and how people perceived the region. Glass number 1 is 100% Chardonnay. **Blanc de Blancs** means white wine from white grapes.

"Glass number 2 is **Barnaut Blanc de Noirs**, a Grand Cru. This is **100% Pinot Noir** from the Grand Cru village called **Bouzy**. This is a smaller producer. They may not have the rich history of Ruinart, but they are almost 200 years old and are attracting a lot of attention. Bouzy is further south from Champagne in the Côte de Bar in a region called **Aube**, which is closer to Chablis than the rest of Champagne. There is a little bit of difference in soil composition and weather, and they grow a lot of Pinot Noir. The fruit tones are darker red and firmer.

"Wine number 3 is the **Bollinger Special Cuvee** (James Bond's Champagne). It contains the three major grapes: **Pinot Noir**, **Pinot Meunier**, and **Chardonnay**. It is a wine aiming for balance and combining wines number 1 and 2.

A question was asked why the Pinot wines were not red. That is because the color from any wine comes from the grape skin, but if you do not allow the skins to contact the juice for any length of time, it will come out white, or clear."

Our two oysters had different names and came from two different areas. The **Barnstable Oyster** is hard to find and hails from Massachusetts. They are at their best when they are served really clean, without many additional toppings, to allow their nutty and briny taste to come forth. Accordingly, only a small bit of lemon and chopped chive flower were added to the Barnstable.

The **Blue Point** came from Virginia, and was presented more classically, with Crème Fraîche topped with caviar. This dressed up style obscured some of the oyster natural flavor with its heavy cream taste. The Barnstable was specially ordered from a specialty producer. Of the three Champagnes, I preferred the Pinot Noir based Barnaut.

Our next course was **Spring Green Salad: Farm Egg, Faba Bean, Radish, House Pickles and Honey**. The lettuce came from **Squeaky Green Organics** near Plattsmouth, NE. There was a variety of acids on the plate, pickles, honey vinaigrette, the bitterness in the greens. This was really a delicious, wine friendly salad. Besides the above listed ingredients, it contained cauliflower, onion, a white cheese like ricotta, and Brown Butter Crumble, which added a bit of grit at the bottom. I couldn't place the House pickled vegetable and had to ask. It turned out to be pickled radish. Matt wanted a wine with a high degree of acidity in it but a lot of versatility.

Our Champagne was **Drappier Brut Nature**. Drappier is a well known wine, but not so much sold in NE. This wine is a **Blanc de Noirs as well as a Brut Nature**. This led Matt to discuss sweetness levels in Champagne. "Drappier is located in a village called **Urville** in the Aube. The area is famous for Pinot Noir, and grapes were planted by the Romans 2000 years ago. The cellars were built in 1152 by monks. The family that owns it today took over in 1808. **Brut Nature means they add absolutely no sugar to this**. There is no sweetness added to the dosage. Legally, **Nature is 0 to 3 grams per liter of sugar**. We do not even perceive sugar until it gets to about 12 grams per liter. So this is as tart, clean and crisp of a style of Champagne that you can get. The interesting thing is that this wine is also 100% Pinot Noir, something you rarely see.

"In the circle of geeky sommeliers, there is a big discussion on what kind of glass you should serve Champagne in. >



< You can serve Champagne in whatever you have and it tastes good. You can put it in all purpose glasses, or in Burgundy Glasses like this course, where it gives full aromatics. Some producers, like Roederer, recommends Burgundy Glasses." But Matt likes the tradition of having a flute glass. There are multiple reasons to have a flute [one reason is it highlights and preserves the mousse, or bubbles better, editor]. But Matt wanted to highlight the Pinot Noir aromatics of this unique wine, and what better than to put it in a Burgundy Glass.

A **'Hot Pot' of Dungeness Crab, Pork Belly, Turnip, Carrot, Leek and Beet** was next. This was served in a very lively sauce which had a bit of sharpness and a taste I couldn't quite identify. I had to ask. The secret ingredient turned out to be ginger. My dish was served tepid, which didn't hurt it in the least. Celestial crab meat was hitting the high notes like a soprano, while the contrasting earthy pork belly acted as a contrast and hit the low notes like a bass. Pork and chicken broth, ginger and spices made up the sauce. Earth and Sea contrast. Delicious! True Gourmet.

Our next Champagne house is run by two brothers. "Our Champagne was the **Aubry Brut Premier Cru**. This wine is marked **RM**, or **Récoltant Manipulant**. It means is that they grow their own grapes. A 100% grower producer. You are controlling everything from beginning to the end in this estate bottled establishment run by two twin brothers." [the other two codes are **CM**, or **co-opérateur** (a co-op) and **RC**, **Récoltant co-opérateur**, a member of a co-op who buys back wine from them to sell under their own label. editor.]

"Pierre and Phillipe are almost complete opposite personalities. Phillipe is very talkative and will tell you everything about the wine, while his brother will sit silently in a corner smoking a cigarette. One unusual thing about this RM grower is that they are committed to 6 of the 7 grape varieties allowed in Champagne. Besides the afore mentioned varieties, this wine also contains **Arbanne**, **Petit Messlier**, and **Promonteau** also known as **Pinot Gris**, but the local name is Promonteau." [The 7th permitted grape variety is **Pinot Blanc**, editor.] "The smallest percentage in this wine is Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, opposite of what we have been tasting. They do not use much oak in fermenting, but they do use oak in aging, making a solera Champagne. They actually have vintages in this wine going back to 1998. So they are blending every vintage they can going back to 1998 to give you the style they want. This is a **Brut**, which can be anywhere **from 0 to 12 grams of sugar per liter**. This particular wine is about 7 grams per liter. A lot of acidity driving it. A

unique style of Champagne that will go with the dish, which has a little Korean influence, some Hot Pot influence. Crab, pork belly, pork broth there is both richness and solidity in this dish." Matt wanted a wine with just as much diversity to pair up with that.

Grass Fed Wagyu Beef: Oyster Mushroom, Asparagus, Stuffed Baby Pepper was our main course. The earthy, perfectly charred beef was absolutely fabulous and expertly, perfectly cooked, with its melt in your mouth unami deliciousness. The beef was topped with a white Mushroom Butter Sauce, and to the side a Green Onion Sauce provided a sauce for a stuffed roasted pepper. This was the best Wagyu I've had this year.

To stand up to the forceful flavors, two rosé Champagnes were served: The **Moutard Champagne Rosé** from Champagne, and the **Scharffenberger Rose** which started in Mendocino County, CA, and branched out into the Anderson Valley. "The interesting thing about Scharffenberger is that it is an established California producer established in 1981. Compared to how old the French houses are, this is relatively young. They gained their AVA in 1981, even before Anderson Valley which is 1983. It is north of Sonoma in a quieter region of the wine country. Tasting prices are cheaper than Napa or Sonoma. Scharffenberger has had the same winemaker since 1989, a man named Tex Sawyer. **Scharffenberger is now run by Roederer**, right next door. This is an Anderson Valley style, mostly Pinot Noir but a good amount of Chardonnay blended into it. The other wine is the **Moutard Champagne Rosé**. This is 100% Pinot Noir from the Aube, a region well known for Pinot Noir. The family has roots going back to 1600 so they are well established. You will see a little different tone on the nose with this wine. It has a little bit of forest floor, kind of mushroomy tone coming in. Recall that you already had a 100% Pinot Noir earlier with the Barnaut. The main difference is the skin contact. Just a brief grape skin contact. You get a little bit of salmon color, but also of the strawberry and red fruit tones and you get a little bit more of a tannic profile as well. Two great examples of rosé."

We ended with **Rhubarb Many Ways: Black Walnut, Tart Crust, Vanilla Custard**. Rhubarb green stalks with a Rhubarb gel gave a tart and acidic flavor, but it was contrasted with the richness and sweetness of the vanilla custard. Our Champagne was the sweetest of the evening. A **Margaine Demi-Sec Premier Cru** was served from half bottles. "**Demi-Sec** is not as sweet as it gets, but in the range of **sweetness it is 32 to 50 grams per liter**. This particular bottle falls right at the bottom of that range at 32, barely getting into Demi-Sec category. A. Margaine is an interesting producer, in a tiny spot of the

Montagne de Reims district, the home to many famous houses. Many big names are in this area. They are located in this very, very small spot called **Villers-Marmery** a region known for Chardonnay surrounded by a sea of Pinot Noir. It has a particular clone of Chardonnay that is only grown in this area. This wine is completely unique in that aspect and you will notice the Chardonnay on the nose. In addition, this producer allows no malolactic fermentation in their wine. The last three wines allowed complete malolactic acidity, which allows the acidity to tone down and become more lactic acid rather than tartaric or malic acid like you see in apples. They leave the acid in this because there is sweetness and they want to balance the sweetness with tartness. It is an intricately balanced wine even though it has sweetness. We are pairing this wine with Rhubarb from Nisnabotna Naturals a local producer. **Rhubarb Done Many Ways** is a play on Rhubarb tart. You will see Rhubarb in gelée, pickled, every way the chef can think of and a little black walnut crust broken around it. We really wanted the balance of tartness and sweetness in the food to highlight the wine as well."

Many thanks to Matt Brown, **Head Chef Jacob Newton**, **Sous Chef James Calkins** and certified sommeliers **David Eckler**, **Kaleb Kiger**, and the entire staff who gave up their Sunday off to serve us. Thanks as well to our producers, **Patti and Steve Hipple** who imported the idea of an all Champagne dinner from an IWFS international festival.















A NOTE FROM THE BOARD:

Two Days in Champagne BY DIANE FORRISTALL

In July, 2013, Gary & I traveled on our 4th trip with Washington State University Viticulture & Enology to taste our way through France. The first region to explore was Champagne, which is a fairly short journey east of Paris. We based our stay in the ancient city of Reims, within walking distance of the old Roman wall that surrounds part of the city.

Our first day, we toured the Taittinger visitor center and explored the underground chalk caves. Our guide gave us a history of the Taittinger wine house and of making champagne. They own over 700 acres of vineyards which supply about half of their production. Their vineyards are planted with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Meunier. They produce over 30 crus. In Champagne a cru is a village. The site was formerly an abbey and the monks made and stored champagne in the chalk caves about 40 feet below ground. Those caves connect to deeper caverns around 60 feet deep that were excavated by the Romans. The abbey was destroyed during the French Revolution but the caves were not damaged. The caves were also used by residents for shelter during the wars. These caves are now used by **Taittinger** and other champagne houses to store and age thousands of bottles of champagne.

Our tour ended with a tasting and time to explore Reims and take a guided tour through the Royal Notre Dame cathedral, where the kings of France were crowned.

For history buffs, Google the Reims Cathedral and learn of the crowning of Clovis in 469, the regions' liberation from the English in 1429 by Joan of Arc, the bombing and burning of the cathedral during WW1. One of the newer stain glass art features 3 large lancet windows showing the whole production story of making wine from the vineyard to bottling.

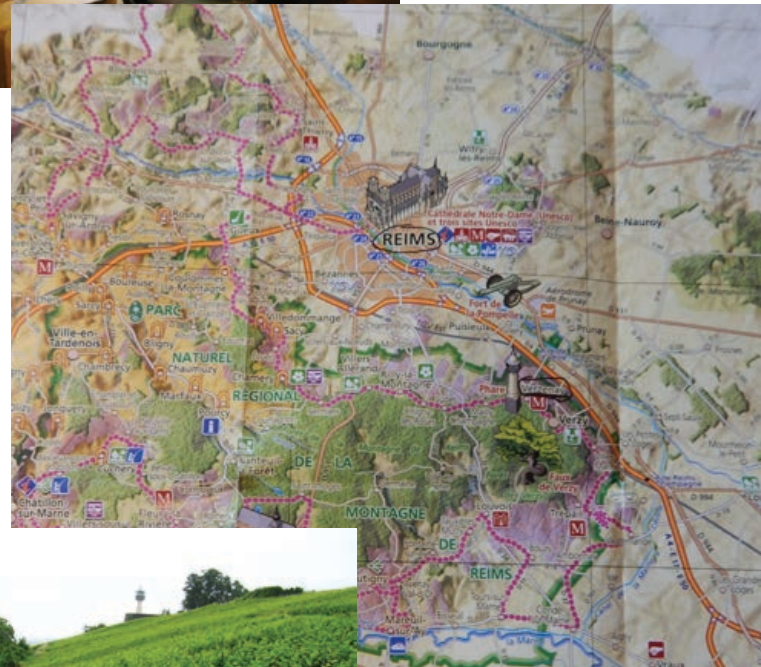
Next was a tour of the **G. H. Mumm** Champagne house in Reims. They pointed out their cru, premier cru and grand cru areas on a map that also showed several processing sites where the grapes were crushed after being hand-picked. We toured the underground chalk caves to see some of the bottle storage and an extensive museum of vintage champagne making equipment. Our tour ended with a glass of bubbly. >



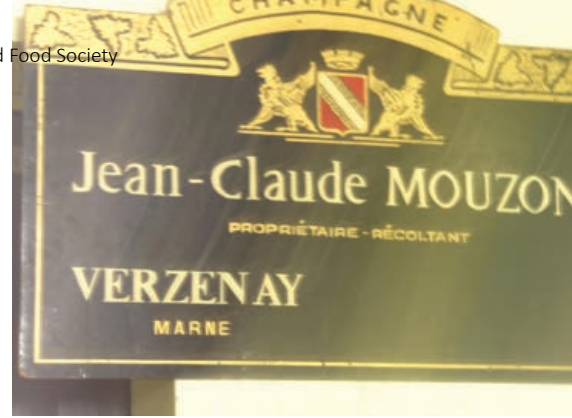
< Our 2nd day, we traveled out into the countryside through the old Montagne forest. Our first stop was to the **Lighthouse of Verzenay**, which is now a museum of the history of wine in the region. We overlooked the vineyards from the top of the lighthouse. Verzenay is a small village of 1,000, (shown SE of Reims on the map). Their vineyards are labeled grand cru due to their elevation and quality of the grapes. We met with an enthusiastic champagne vintner, **Cedric Lahemade**. As pleasant as the tasting room managers were at the large Champagne houses, our group was happy to finally talk one-on-one with a vintner. Cedric was happy to be among fellow grape growers and wine makers and was open to sharing technical information.

Cedric is the vintner for **Jean-Claude Mouzon** in Verzenay. The wine store and cellar are attached to their home. The family owns a 3 hectare vineyard classified as grand cru, 95% pinot noir and the rest Chardonnay. Cedric and his wife, Frederique, are the 4th generation of the company, Cedric marrying into the family.

After that, we traveled to **Epernay** for lunch at **Chez Max** then visited the Champagne wine makers' cooperative of Hautvilliers, **Beaumont de Crayeres**. Today 250 grape growers participate in the cooperative with 9 – 12 year contracts with very strict growing requirements. The vineyards are 60% Pinot Muenier, 25% Chardonnay, and 15% Pinot Noir. Beaumont des Crayeres produces around 600,000 bottles of champagne, exporting most to the UK, Germany, Sweden, & Japan.



In the winery, the **bottling line** was automated. Champagne bottles, that had been aging during the secondary fermentation, were turned upside down to draw the sediment into the neck. Then the neck of the bottles were placed in a solution to freeze. The bottles proceeded along the line and were automatically disgorged. Further along the line a dosage of sugar and wine was added to the bottles. Then the bottles were corked and wired.



We ended our visit with 3 tastings of Champagne. A grand reserve, 60% Pinot Meunier, 25% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir; grand prestige, 40% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir and 20% Pinot Meunier; and a grand rose', 40% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay and 10% Pinot Meunier.



Believe it or not, Champagne was initially not sparkling wine. It was simply called "wine of Champagne" between the 16th and 17th centuries. According to legend, the process that allowed the wine to have its effervescence was discovered by the Benedictine monk Dom Perignon (sound familiar?). Dom Pérignon (1638–1715) was a monk and cellar master at the Benedictine abbey in Hautvillers. His method, however, was approximate. Scientific advancements, such as the work of Louis Pasteur on fermentation, allowed for its effervescence to remain intact. Historically, **Maison Ruinart** is the first Champagne wine producer to propose sparkling champagne (1729).



Tomorrow – onto the Burgundy region!
Cheers! Au Revoir Champagne!



WHAT ABOUT CHAMPAGNE?

By John Fisher

I'm sure you've heard the expression: "Champagne goes with just about any food." The statement is essentially correct. Champagne is a light, high acid wine with delicate, complex flavors. As you will recall, light wines with high acidity are very versatile. However, what makes Champagne exceptional is its **creamy mousse**. **It gives Champagne a structural quality that is unique - a high acid wine with a rich, round, creamy mouth feel.** The creamy mousse of Champagne ties into the richness of creamy dishes, and the spark of its acidity lightens the weight of dishes, while at the same time it props up their flavors. You can see that wines with this description will pair-up with a vast number of dishes - both heavy and light.

A big, thick, rich oyster stew would be a failure with soft Chardonnay. A very good match for this dish is quality Champagne. Champagne will work with the oyster stew no matter what its weight. The rich creamy mousse of Champagne couples to the soft creamy mouth feel of the stew. At the same time, acids in the Champagne cut richness and prop-up flavors in the dish. However, beware of cheap Champagne. These will not work! The finely beaded, creamy mousse of the Champagne will be missing and all you will be left with is the rough acidity of the still wine and the nettlesome mouth-feel from coarse carbonation.

Obviously, Champagne is not a big heavy wine; it is a very light wine and delicate one. **The creamy mouthfeel from quality Champagne combined with the crisp acidity is the secret of its versatility.** A dichotomy is built within the wine -- it is round and smooth, which ties into creamy richness; yet crisp and sharp which ties into lightness. In any other wine, the combinations of smooth, soft, creamy, and round are incongruous with tart, sharp, angular and acidic.

Let's look at the **pairings where Champagne does not work**. **Smoky foods** compete with the delicate flavors in Champagne or any other white wine. This is especially true for smoked oily fish. Champagne develops a sweet, oily, fishy taste in such pair-ups. The classical match up of "Champagne and **Caviar**" is also a not very publicized mismatch. The distinctive flavors in caviar compete and react with the delicate flavors in Champagne and a fishy taste develops. Champagne also seems to pall when paired to red meat or other heavy weight dishes. Champagne will work with these dishes, but a better match can usually be found.

Now, **where does Champagne shine?** Foods that are **puffed-up with batter** or have a **light airy character** are a natural for Champagne. The light nature of the dish reflects to the airiness of the

wine--the wine has similar traits to the food, as its mousse is light, airy and also puffed-up.

Champagne is a wonderful match-up to **fried foods, especially batter-fried food**. Puffed-up foods like **shrimp tempura** (Japan), **fritto misto** (Italy) and **pakorras** (India) are a natural match for Champagne.

In **creamy dishes**, especially **creamed soups**, the creamy nature of the dish echoes similar traits in the wine. Food topped with rich creamy sauces, such as Alfredo or béchamel, successfully tie to Champagne, especially if they are seafood or white meat based.


The high levels of acidity found in Champagne serve to support and invigorate the flavors of such dishes as **raw clams, oysters, mussels, ceviche, and oriental dishes such as sashimi, sushi, and shrimp toast**. Champagnes are among the lightest of wines, which make them an ideal accompaniment to **salads, light vegetable dishes** or other light entrees. Champagne is great for starters; serve it with **hors d'oeuvres** and **light appetizers**. Breakfast dishes are very difficult to match with wine. Champagne is the best wine to pair-up with **bacon and eggs**.

From his book: The Evaluation of Wine A Comprehensive Guide to the Art of Wine Tasting. Writers Club Press 2001.





Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!

 **June 3, 2017**
Residence of Nate and Liz Farmer
Theme: Barbeque
A State Champion BBQ chef will
cook us dinner
Producers: Farmers, Hipple
and Lowell Wilhite

 **July 15, 2017**
Council Bluffs Country Club
Wines and cuisine of Argentina
Producers: Kossows and Tritschs

 **August 17, 2017**
Pitch Pizzeria West
Theme: TBD
Producers: Thrashers,
Klemkes and Hipple

 **September 24, 2017**
Martin Cabin
Theme: TBD
Producers: Connie & Gary Martin

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about what's going on!

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