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© Champagne Pierre Gimonnet | Gimonnet's wines are often overlooked by wine writers. As the festive season approaches, **Tom Hyland** looks at some unfairly overlooked bubbly. Posted Wednesday, 09-Dec-2015

When it comes to Champagne, a prestige cuvée is the irresistible icing on the proverbial cake.

Setting the standard for each producer, these wines are the ultimate not only in terms of quality, but also esteem, conveying a message of breeding, luxury and class to anyone who enjoys a glass. Consider just a few of the most famous examples, such as Dom Pérignon, Roederer Cristal and Pol Roger's Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill, and you get the idea.

Keep in mind that there are some producers that do not make a prestige cuvée; Jacquesson, one of the most in-demand Champagne houses, is an example, as they focus on single vineyard offerings, treating these as equals. But hundreds of Champagne firms, ranging from small growers to large houses and cooperatives, do present a prestige cuvée in the finest vintages. Yet, despite the quality of these wines, too many are unknown and/or unheralded; reasons include limited production as well as a lack of marketing.

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Here then, are notes on several distinguished prestige cuvées that should be better known.

2006 [Drappier Grand Sendrée Rosé](#): One of the best Champagne producers as far as price/quality relationship, Drappier flies under the radar, as they are located in the Côte des Bar, in the far southern reaches of the region, an area wrongfully dismissed by Champagne devotees. A saignée rosé, where the color is derived from the skins of the Pinot Noir grapes (85 percent, with 15 percent Chardonnay), this is a wonderfully complex offering with a rich mid-palate and admirable finesse. 3-5 years.

2000 [Duval-Leroy Cuvée des Femmes](#): This aptly named cuvée (the proprietor and winemaker are women) is a mature Champagne that improves after a few minutes in the glass. Beautifully crafted, this is primarily oak-fermented Chardonnay, offering very good acidity and excellent persistence. Powerful, yet subtle – very classy! 3-5 years.

2008 [Pierre Gimonnet Special Club Millésime de Collection](#): Special Club Champagnes represent the best cuvées from a small group of member producers; only wines of superior quality are bottled with this label. This offering, from the outstanding 2008 vintage, is 100-percent Chardonnay with superb varietal character, impressive depth of fruit and exceptional finesse. Gorgeous now – peak in 7-10 years.

2005 [Philippe Gonet Blanc de Blancs Belemnita](#): This first-rate producer in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger is all about Chardonnay, releasing as many as five separate Blanc de Blancs each year. The Belemnita is from very old vineyards (some more than 75 years) and is a wine of great charm and finesse. A lovely expression of Chardonnay from the Côte des Blancs. Peak in 7-10 years.

2002 Gosset Celebris: Perhaps as the caves of this Epernay house are not located on the Avenue de Champagne, this firm doesn't receive enough attention, but Gosset continues to dazzle. From an exceptional vintage, this Pinot Noir/Chardonnay blend offers powerful depth of fruit and remarkable freshness, and is structured for the long term. A truly great Champagne, this will continue to evolve for 10-15 years.

2010 Marc Hebrart Special Club: Jean-Paul Hebrart blends his estate fruit as well as anyone in the region. This 55/45 Pinot Noir/Chardonnay cuvée, is textbook in every regard, from aromatics to texture. This is about restraint and balance, not power. 5-7 years.



© Champagne Cattier | Tradition reigns in the Clos du Moulin vineyard.

Cattier Clos du Moulin: 50/50 Chardonnay/Pinot Noir; a blend of three vintages (2005, 2006, 2007). Medium-full with excellent weight on the palate, impressive complexity and subtle minerality. Quite powerful – best in 7-10 years.

1995 Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires: Everyone recognizes this producer, right? But few know this glorious cuvée – how nice to find that the 1995, a legendary vintage, is currently available. Textbook pear and honey aromas, great richness on the palate and exceptional harmony of all components. Made from 100-percent Grand Cru Chardonnay at 20 years of age; marvelous purity and no signs of oxidation. Truly stunning – peak in 5-7 years.

1998 Henriot Cuvée des Enchanteleurs: Henriot never seems to get the proper respect; perhaps this cuvée will change popular opinion. 50/50 Chardonnay/Pinot Noir with beautiful mature aromas of biscuit and brioche, very good acidity and excellent persistence. Wonderful balance and outstanding complexity. Peak in 5-7 years.

2006 Jacquart Cuvée Alpha: This cooperative, located in the city of Reims, is experiencing a renaissance under the direction of chef de cave Floriane Eznack. This release of Cuvée Alpha is a 50/50 Chardonnay/Pinot Noir blend with honey and toasty aromas, and a finish with chalky, biscuity notes and notable richness. Peak in 5-7 years.

2006 J. Lasalle Special Club: A 60/40 blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, this is silky and seamless, with an endless finish. This is definitely a feminine-styled Champagne, not a surprising result as three generations of women from the Lasalle family oversee production. Peak in 3-5 years.

2009 Mailly Cuvée L'Intemporelle: This excellent cooperative, named for its location in Mailly, a grand cru village, offers this 60/40 Pinot Noir/Chardonnay blend with appealing floral, pear and citrus aromas, backed by excellent concentration and beautiful acidity. Impressive winemaking – precise and clear-cut in its presentation, and quite delicious! Peak in 5-7 years.

Palmer Amazone Brut: A 50/50 blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay; a blend of five vintages, dating back to 1995. An amazing 14 years of aging on the lees. Dried pear, brioche and marmalade aromas along with a subtle smokiness. Very good acidity, powerful finish, excellent complexity – stunning! Peak in 7-10 years.

1999 Bruno Paillard N.P.U.: Bruno Paillard's cuvées mirror the class and grace of the man; the N.P.U. (Nec Plus Ultra) resonates! Barrel-fermented blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay exclusively from grand cru villages. Layered mid-palate, excellent complexity and persistence; textbook mature toasty flavors with a distinct chalkiness. Still fresh, peak in 7-10 years.

2004 Joseph Perrier Cuvée Josephine: Made from 52 percent Chardonnay and 48 percent Pinot Noir, all grand cru fruit. Excellent weight on the palate, very good acidity, notable persistence, ideal harmony, great complexity.

Jean-Claude Fourmon, president of this house, calls this wine "his symphony". Peak in 7-10 years.

2007 [Thiénot Cuvée Garance Blanc de Rouges](#): This meticulous producer crafts several prestige cuvées; this 100-percent Pinot Noir, named for proprietor Alain Thiénot's daughter Garance, is extremely enticing. Flavors of pear, cherry and strawberry, deeply concentrated with a powerful finish. Peak in 5-7 years.

2007 [Vilmart Couer de Cuvée](#): Laurent Vilmart is a grower-extraordinaire; this cuvée is from 50-year-old estate vines. An 80/20 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, oak-aged, with biscuit and brioche aromas. Full-bodied with exceptional length in the finish. A powerful, yet refined cuvée; best in 5-7 years.

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