

# KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANT

## CHAMPAGNE



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## J. LASSALLE

by Daniel Brunier

I FIRST TASTED the J. Lassalle Champagnes during a KLWM tasting in San Francisco. For me, the unifying character of the Lassalle wines is their backbone and purity. Depending on whether we are discussing the *Préférence*, *Spécial Club*, or *Cuvée Angéline*, we are of course talking about varying levels of finesse and depth, yet each expresses the house style: straightforward in both aroma and structure.

I've since had a number of occasions to ruminate on the different cuvées, and I must admit that each one seduces me with its unique personality. The freshness and sparkle of the *Préférence*, demonstrating the side of Champagne that gives immediate pleasure, is simple, honest, and direct. The structure and minerality of the 2004 *Spécial Club* gives a more serious, more reserved, more complex wine of great length. The grand finesse and elegance of the *Cuvée Angéline*—which after a few years of aging is velvety, delicate, and deep—make it apt to accompany any meal. It is noticeably mineral but never severely so. I remember being moved by a 2005.

I realize now that it took me a while to wholly embrace all the J. Lassalle wines, for which the word “brut” is not a vain description. As with many wines with a pronounced personality and strong character, the tasting process has several phases: analysis, surprise, contemplation, connection, and, finally, admiration.



*Four generations of Lassalles*

© Michel Boudot

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NV PRÉFÉRENCE BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
NV BRUT ROSÉ *PREMIER CRU*  
2005 BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
2008 “CUVÉE ANGÉLINE” BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
2004 SPÉCIAL CLUB BRUT *PREMIER CRU*

*Please inquire about availability of tenths, magnums, and jeroboams.*



## WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING (A GOOD BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE)

*by Lyle Railsback*

**A**T A RECENT PARTY I had the opportunity to taste a famous bottle of Champagne that bears an even more famous marigold-colored label. While it is an almost ubiquitous name brand that we commonly warn our customers against, it had been a while since I'd tasted a bottle. What a dud. No technical flaws, just boring—like a beautiful woman everyone wants to talk to, but who can't hold a conversation.

Things changed when I opened a bottle of the Lassalles' *Préférence*. I saw the light, so to speak. The *Préférence* is the wine they consider to be their basic *cuvée*, but very little is “basic” about it. We were assailed by the aroma of limestone from this perfect blend of Meunier, Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay that is aged on the lees for forty-eight months. A lot of “grower” Champagne is being imported these days, but the difference lies in who is doing the growing, and Lassalle has it down. Taste for yourself.

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## PAUL BARA

by Chris Santini

**N**APOLEON ONCE WROTE that he drank Champagne to celebrate victories and he drank Champagne to console himself after a loss. It's a common theme for Champagne, the wine like the land, of ups and downs, fortunes and misfortunes. In Bouzy, on the southeastern flank of the Montagne de Reims, you feel the weight of the misfortunes of World Wars I and II, from the dreary postwar architecture to the austere mien of its inhabitants. At the same time there is a feeling of grandeur in the vineyards and the cellars, a pride in the long-lasting reputation its wines have earned. While officially classified *grand cru* since 1895, the wines of Bouzy were a staple at banquets of Versailles and at coronations of kings in Reims long before that. The Pinot Noir grown on this perfectly inclined, south-facing limestone slope has for centuries been sought after for its complexity, bouquet, and soft tannins.



*Paul Bara's underground cellar*

© Paul Bara



The Bara family has been through all that Bouzy has been through, an integral part of its landscape for centuries, through good times and bad. For generations they've been pioneers, first leading the way away from the *négociants*, then away from the cooperatives, and setting one of the earliest examples of true grower Champagne.

At Bara, their Pinot Noir is the backbone of every cuvée they produce, be it white or rosé *grand cru* Champagne, or red Bouzy Coteaux Champenois. Chardonnay, the only other variety grown at the estate (in small quantity), is used as a mere blending agent, a touch of freshness and finesse to the masculine style of the *terroir*. Production is strictly old-school, with only free run and first press juice used, fermentation in small cement tanks, and aging and riddling in cold, extremely deep cellars for several years. Nothing is released until ready.

Paul Bara, who began working with Kermit in the 1980s and is now ninety-one years old, long ago handed over the reins to his daughter Chantale, a tough and no-nonsense captain of a tight ship. Tradition, integrity, and pride carry on.

NV BRUT RÉSERVE *GRAND CRU*  
NV BRUT ROSÉ *GRAND CRU*  
2004 BRUT *GRAND CRU*  
2004 SPÉCIAL CLUB *GRAND CRU*  
2006 SPÉCIAL CLUB ROSÉ *GRAND CRU*  
2000 "COMTESSE MARIE DE FRANCE" *GRAND CRU*  
2004 BOUZY ROUGE *GRAND CRU*

*Please inquire about availability of tenths and magnums.*

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## VEUVE FOURNY & FILS

by Anthony Lynch

**T**HE LATEST ADDITION to our portfolio, as far as Champagne is concerned, provides a stark contrast to Lassalle's rich, lush wines and Bara's ripe Pinot Noir from Bouzy. Veuve Fourny & Fils is located in Vertus in the Côte des Blancs, the long hill renowned for its fine Chardonnay-based Champagnes. The domaine has been in the family since 1856, and winemaking duties have been passed down from generation to generation starting with Madame Fourny herself. Brothers Emmanuel and Charles now run the domaine, with their backgrounds in oenology and commerce, respectively, creating a dynamic duo in all aspects of the job.

One thing that sets the Fournys apart from other growers in the area is their meticulous attention to the local *terroir*—a perennial focal point that has distinguished the house style from the start. The village of Vertus enjoys *premier cru* status, not the least due to its soils of lime-infused chalk. Another factor is the slope's exposure to the south and southeast, which is unique to this part of the Côte des Blancs and crucial for attaining optimal ripeness year after year. It is the quality of this *terroir*, coupled with old vines inherited from their forerunners, that lead Emmanuel and Charles to vinify every parcel—numbering over thirty—individually with the goal of obtaining the best from each site before blending.

A unique vinification also differentiates Veuve Fourny from other houses. Depending on the cuvée and the vintage, a certain percentage of the wine is likely to see Burgundian barrels or undergo malolactic fermentation. These practices add roundness to soften out what would otherwise be a sharp acidity. The result is textural excellence that is showcased by their Champagnes, such as the sublime Cuvée R.

Most of the house's wines are characterized by precision and purity, thanks to the dominance of Chardonnay and the care taken to preserve the integrity of the fruit each step of the process. Minimal *dosage* is added, or none in the case of the laser-like, mineral-laden Brut Nature. The non-vintage wines all age for



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more than two years on their lees, lending tremendous complexity to the Blanc de Blancs as well as the Grande Réserve, which includes a portion of Pinot Noir. All of the Fournys' Champagnes feature extreme freshness and elegance, from the seductive Rosé Brut to the delicate vintage Blanc de Blancs.

NV GRANDE RÉSERVE BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
NV EXTRA DRY *PREMIER CRU*  
NV BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
NV BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT NATURE *PREMIER CRU*  
NV BRUT ROSÉ *PREMIER CRU*  
NV ROSÉ BRUT "LES ROUGESMONTS" *PREMIER CRU*  
NV CUVÉE "R" EXTRA-BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
2007 BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT *PREMIER CRU*  
2006 BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT *PREMIER CRU*

*Please inquire about availability of tenths, magnums, and jeroboams.*



*Charles and Emmanuel Fourny*

© Veuve Fourny

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## CHAMPAGNE AT KLWM

by Kermit Lynch

**A**S FAR AS I KNOW, we were the first to import estate-bottled, artisanal Champagne. That was back in 1981. Interest in vigneron who make Champagne from their own grapes has grown on this side of the Atlantic ever since, and the array of domaines and *terroirs* now available warms my heart. However, when I opened my shop back in 1972, even Burgundy was dominated by *négociants*. What a difference today.

Champagne J. Lassalle was the first, and I continue to work with the domaine—after more than thirty years! In 1981 I imported their 1973. Lassalle's cellar is in Chigny-Les-Roses on the *premier cru* Montagne de Reims. Jules Lassalle left us at way too early an age, but his wife, daughter, and granddaughter preserve his heritage, his wisdom. One of his lessons, which hardly anyone else in Champagne heeds: allow Champagnes to follow their nature—allow them to complete the malolactic fermentation, just as the great whites do in Burgundy.

In 1981 I also began importing a totally dry *non-dosé* cuvée from Champagne Legras in Chouilly (*premier cru*). Such bottlings did not arouse much interest back then. Today, they're rather hip.

For several years, I imported Champagne Billecart-Salmon (which is a "house," so not estate-bottled), and their rosé, along with Domaine Tempier's, changed the attitude toward rosés here at home, which had been quite negative.

Burton Anderson, author of *Vino*, also wrote for the *International Herald Tribune*. In 1981 he told me that the staff in Paris drove up to Bouzy to buy direct from Paul Bara. I visited, tasted Bara's *grand cru*, and began to import it. When you try it, appreciate that Bouzy is the finest Pinot Noir *terroir* in Champagne. Notice the unusual flavor of red fruits.

I was also madly in love with Champagne Baptiste-Pertois in Cramant (*premier cru*). He was the Marius Gentaz of Champagne, and both masters retired the same year. Only one bottle of Baptiste-Pertois remains in my cellar. Damn it.

Then, about five years ago, I organized an extensive tasting of artisanal Champagnes, hoping to hook more prizes. I narrowed them down to three favorites. One would have been over \$100 per bottle, one over \$150, and one was Veuve Fourny from Vertus (*premier cru*), bargain-priced in the world of fine Champagne. Guess which I chose to import. And Veuve Fourny has been a hit all over the country ever since.

You might be surprised to learn that I don't like a *goût de terroir* to dominate the taste of Champagnes. If it dominates, you lose finesse. I want some, obviously—but only enough to keep things interesting.

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