



Pieter Verheyde

CHAMPAGNE

A sparkling discovery



PHOTOGRAPHY

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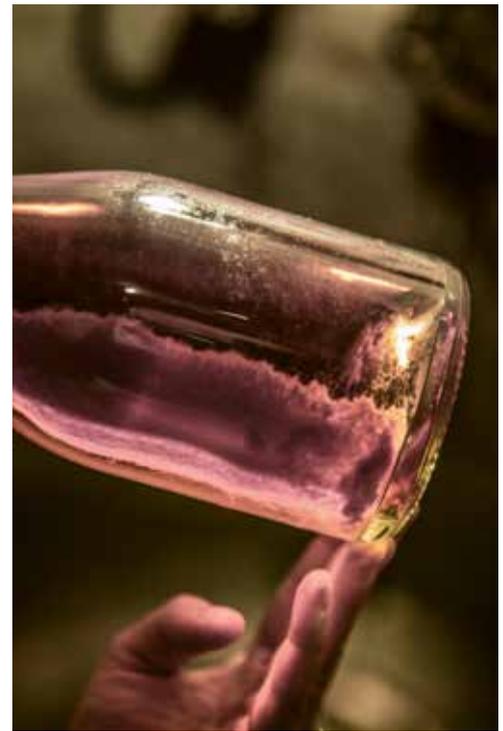
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CHAMPAGNE, A SPECIAL MOMENT

Of course, champagne belongs at parties, weddings and births, victories, diplomas, inaugurations and promotions. What we sometimes forget about this sparkling pleasure is that champagne is also wine, wine with a very special status. Each champagne has its own character, its style, its moment and its taste. We speak of brut and sec, of white and rosé, but the nuances are infinitely greater, as every champagne lover will testify. What also makes champagne special is that there is no other wine where human knowledge and skills play such an important role. Nowhere is so much time spent on the whole process, from tending the vine to the final product, the bottle with its special cork and wire hood.

Together with Burgundy and Piedmont, Champagne is one of my favourite wine regions. I travel there again and again to taste, but also to hear stories. What's this family's history? What technique have they developed here? Why do these plots give such a special grape? I am happy to take my readers with me on these trips, because the more you know about a wine and its maker, the greater the pleasure you have in drinking it.



In the last thirty or forty years, a lot has changed in Champagne. There have been many new *récoltants-manipulants*, sons have taken over family estates, new generations have opted for new styles, in some houses veritable revolutions have occurred. At the same time, however, a certain sluggishness reigns in the region. Champagne making takes time and, unlike other wines, it is not marketed after one year. A nice Burgundy is ready after sixteen months, a good champagne needs to ripen.

It is precisely during this period of rest, when the wine undergoes its second fermentation in the bottle, that its complexity develops. There are houses where this ripening *sur lattes* lasts seven to ten years, sometimes even longer. In the houses we visited for this book, this is often the case. This book includes world-famous names, but also very modest houses, where the grower welcomes us with mud on his hands. We have selected them based on the precision with which they make their wines and on the emotion that these summon. Because pleasure and emotion is what champagne is all about. When I taste a really delicious wine, I get chills up my left arm. Then it's no longer about notes in a tasting book, but all about delicious or not. In a world where everything goes fast, experience is important, and when such a moment of respite occurs, you really need to enjoy it.



In my childhood days, champagne was a celebration, but above all an exclusive product, a sign of social status. The wine itself was subordinate; the most important thing was that there were bubbles in it. Today, I note that passionate winegrowers almost want to get rid of the bubbles, to display better the

beauty of the wine itself.

Of course, trends are also involved. Today, extra brut and brut nature are the most sought after champagnes, while formerly demi-sec was popular. In those days, champagne was not drunk as an aperitif, but as a dessert wine. Meanwhile, the function of the festive drink – the bubbles at a birth – is increasingly taken over by cava, while the true enthusiasts are looking for special champagnes made with passion and love. Increasingly, the grape growers are working ecologically, realizing the need to respect their soils and keep them healthy. A delicious final product calls for healthy grapes from healthy soil.



The majority of smaller producers whom we discuss here are people who work plot by plot. Everywhere it is the same story: the work in the vineyard, good grapes and very precise pressing are a large part of the art. Then time, lots of time, which for producers also means that they must be financially strong. In the thousands of bottles that sleep in the cellars, it is also their capital that is sleeping. You really feel small when you stand next to cuvées whose content will come onto the market only in 2030.

These people are building the future. Which in many cases also begs the question of succession. What if the children are not interested in continuing the estate?

For us, consumers and sommeliers, there is just the pleasure of the tasting and the fun of the moment. Champagne is something you drink at a party, when meeting with friends, in the afternoon at times, a moment of relaxation after effort... or to do

something good. I will never open a bottle thoughtlessly: a nice champagne demands respect, especially if you know the road it has travelled. Personally, I detest wine snobs. Wine is made for drinking together, for sharing pleasure. Even when you taste in a circle of friends, it has to remain relaxed.

There are people who play sports to relieve the pressure, and there are those who open a good bottle. I belong to the second category.

Pieter Verheyde



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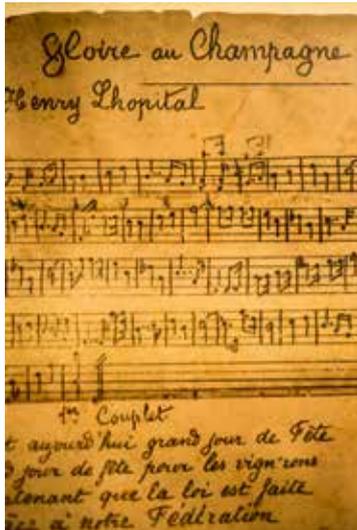
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CHAMPAGNE J. DE TELMONT

**Bertrand and Pascale Lhopital
complement each other well**



In 1911, the phylloxera insect did great damage in the Champagne region. Entire vineyards were destroyed, leaving hardly any grapes with which to produce wine. New plantings were needed, but that required time. Swindlers purchased grapes from other wine regions and even used other products to produce champagne.

For the grape growers this was a catastrophe, and they made clear their unhappiness at this course of action. A revolt smouldered in the villages of Damery and Venteuil.

Only in 1927 was a law promulgated requiring all champagne houses to use only grapes picked within the specified area. Thus originated the Champagne appellation, which is the most rigorous in the world.

The history of the Maison J. de Telmont began in these troubled times, with Henri Lhopital, the first of his generation. Innovative and resourceful, he decided early on not just to grow grapes, but also to process them himself: from 1912 on, he sells his Champagne under his own name.

Eventually, his son André succeeded him. With his knowledge of the terroir and selling techniques, André collected grapes from the best plots of the region. That gave him the opportunity to produce high quality champagne.



Négociant manipulant

650,000 bottles

Champagne J. de Telmont

1, avenue de Champagne

F-51480 DAMERY

+33 3 26 58 40 33

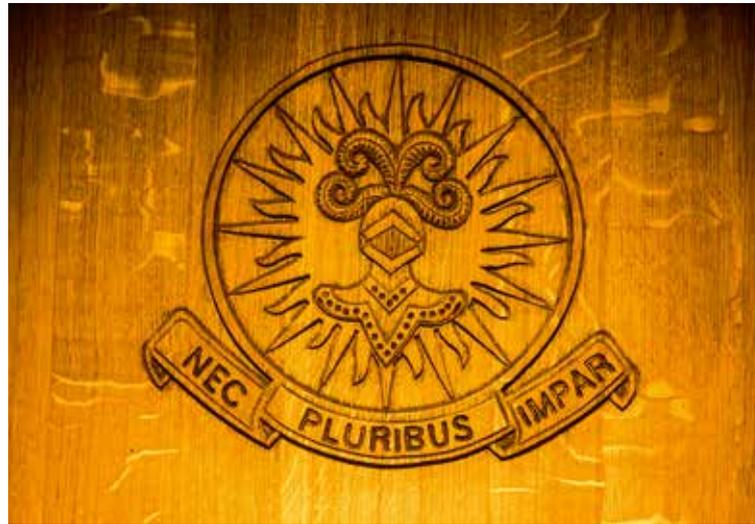
www.champagne-de-telmont.com



André Lhopital went looking for a name that was better suited to the prestige of his *cuvées* than his own family name. One of the plots from which the grapes came was called 'Les Beaumonts' but he could not sell his champagne under this name, so André decided to modify it. In 1949, the Maison de Champagne J. de Telmont was born.

André Lhopital's son Serge brings us to the third generation. Serge had vast production knowledge and commercial talent, boosting sales even further. Year after year, harvest after harvest, the champagne gained recognition and even a certain authority. It was Serge who established J. de Telmont at its current address, where in 1968 new cellars were installed.





←
Nec pluribus impar is Latin for 'Not unequal to many'. The house motto but also a reference to the device of 'Sun King' Louis XIV.



↖
A foudre at J. deTelmont



↓
 Champagne maturing *sur lattes*



→
 The traditional way of attaching the string to the cork





Today, his son Bertrand and daughter Pascale continue the business as the fourth generation. Brother and sister complement each other well. The passing on of knowledge of the terroir and production methods are values that the company continues to cherish. The champagne is still stored corked. Part of the vinification is done in large 50-hectolitre *foudres* (upright barrels), which gives the wines complexity and *matière*.

The many years of experience in both vineyard cellar and the hours spent on the bottles make J. de Telmont one of the great champagnes.

The J. de Telmont house is strongly in favour of allowing the champagne to age for longer than is usually done, that is at least three years *sur lattes* (on racks) for the *bruts* and more than six years for the millésimés. This process yields greater complexity and finer bubbles. This, of course, requires patience, but with this vision this house wants to distinguish itself at world level from other sparkling wines and bring an even higher quality champagne to the market.

The vineyard today covers 33 hectares and has eight crus planted with the three grapes, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay. The vineyards are spread across the villages of Cumières, Damery, Fleury-La-Rivière and Romery.

J. de Telmont has a total production of 650,000 bottles, representing from 63 hectares of 40 different crus, Grands, Premiers as well as other crus. This accounts for the great diversity in the Maison's cuvées.





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© Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Tielt, 2018

D/2018/45/126 – NUR 440-447

ISBN 978 94 014 3475 1

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