

GLASS of BUBBLY

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CELEBRITY INTERVIEWS
BOB CHAMPION MBE
CELIA SAWYER

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that fascinating - I like surprises. Besides, wine experts would agree that most great wines come from barrels.

Then the soil, what we call the *terroir*, plays a big part. Almost all our vineyards are in the community of Boursault which includes our village. Villesaint, Boursault is famous as the place where Veuve Clicquot built her château. We're lucky to have a wide variety of soil types within the village boundaries and the oldest of our vines are nearly 100 years old, which yield wonderful grapes. So now we'd like to make Boursault well known for its Champagnes too.

La Villesenière Champagne is perfect for anyone who is willing to try something a bit out of the ordinary, I think they'll

have a pleasant surprise. You can enjoy them at almost any time and you'll find they pair really well with lots of different food. Laurence and I recently enjoyed a wonderful meal paired with La Villesenière Rosé de Saignée: I had it with grilled king prawns and scallops and Laurence chose a trilogy of 3 cheese in a pastry case – both were fabulous with the rosé and gave us yet another pleasant surprise.

In the UK La Villesenière Champagnes are available from Scalawine, London.

www.champagne-la-villeseniere.com

PUTTING BOURSAULT ON THE MAP

In the heart of La Vallée de La Marne, Laurence and Cyrille Chevenotot-Michez are bringing quite a bit of attention to their sleepy village and Champagnes.

Laurence explains how things have changed almost out of all recognition from 5 years ago. Our original brand Champagne Claude Michez was created back in the 1970s by my parents and at that time they worked with a local cooperative. I became really involved with the business in 1999 and then in 2010 my husband, Cyrille and I decided to become Récoltants Manipulants. Récoltant Manipulant (RM) means that the grapes you use must only come from vineyards you own.

That's why RM Champagnes are sometimes called Grower Champagnes. In addition you have to do everything from A to Z yourself: from planting the vines to making the wine, bottling it and selling it, not forgetting that we also have two children to look after, aged 11 and 15. It's a lot of work, but we wouldn't have it any other way. Every day is different and brings a new challenge – that's what's so interesting in being a small producer.

As if that wasn't enough to do we decided to create a new range of prestige Champagnes as well. It's called La Villesenièrre after the name of the tiny village where we live: Villesaint just next to Boursault.

To say it has gone beyond our expectations would be an understatement. The first bottles were released last year and almost immediately we started getting some great press reviews. One of France's best-known wine magazines called our rosé "a marvel – one of the best rosé wines in France" – and ranked it at number 51 in the best 100 of all wines in France. Jancis Robinson said about our Champagnes "Real complexity on the nose with delicacy too... Great purity on the finish. This is real wine!" She also wrote: "... this wine demands attention. Dry finish and lots to chew on. Serious stuff."

Cyrille talks us through the Champagnes. Currently there are 3 cuvées in the range; Les Cuperies is a Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut from a single plot of just 0.35 hectares. Our Rosé de Saignée is a Brut. It's a rich red colour with lots of flavour and then there's Harmony which is a Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier blend.

All La Villesenièrre Champagnes are fermented and aged in oak barrels. The alternative is to use stainless steel vats and whilst those make life easier for the wine maker, in my view, they produce wines that can be a little lacking in character. On the other hand barrels seem more alive and there are so many subtle differences between them due to their size, their age and where they come from that the wines they produce are never precisely the same from one year to the next and I find

