

GILBERT GAILLARD

THE FRENCH EXPERTS ON WINE

PAGES 117-130
OUR WINTER
SELECTIONS:
CZECH REPUBLIC,
FRANCE, GERMANY,
ITALY & SOUTH AFRICA

Laurent Vaillant (left), cellar
master at Champagne
Lombard, and Thomas
Lombard tasting in the winery.

CHAMPAGNE
THOMAS LOMBARD:
GRANDS CRUS OFFER
CONSISTENT QUALITY FRUIT

L 19045 - 50 - F: 7,95 € - RD



WINTER 2022

CHAMPAGNE TERROIR

dant freshness with notes of white flowers, citrus fruits and a measure of mineral-driven salinity on the finish. Oger, on the other hand, is situated more in a dip – the soils are slightly deeper and consequently the wines are more generous and appetising. Ed: in other words, slightly less acidic and fruitier. Blending the two villages therefore makes perfect sense.

The Bonville family actually comes from Oger and originally sold its grapes to negociants. But falling demand in the 1930s, and the consequential drop in prices of land, prompted it to buy vineyards in the surrounding area, which meant Avize. At the time, everything was done by horse, so growers had to stay within a maximum radius of 2 hours on horseback. Therefore, although the family has a lot of vineyard blocks, they are all fairly close to one another.

The winery also produces single growth Champagnes – from Avize, Oger and Le Mesnil – and whilst it admits that Le Mesnil is perhaps the most prestigious of the three due to the presence of Champagne Salon and Krug's Clos du Mesnil, it would never say a disparaging word against Oger. The Bonvilles love Oger!

The winery also belongs to the Grands Crus d'Exception association which jointly produces a Champagne from all 17 Champagne Grands Crus. The wine, called C17, is due to be released at the end of 2022 – but it has been entirely pre-sold ahead of release.

EPERNAY CHAMPAGNE LOMBARD

Thomas Lombard, the current CEO of this family-run company, takes us on a tour. Although it owns 5.5 hectares of Premier Cru vines, the family also produces Champagne as a negociant – NM – sourcing grapes from 55 hectares of vines, 10 of them classified as Grand Cru. These include Avize, Cramant, Oger and Ambonnay. Lombard stresses the long-term partnership arrangements with grape growers – although contracts can be renewed on an annual basis, some of them stem

ALFRED & FRANCK BONVILLE AT HARVEST TIME

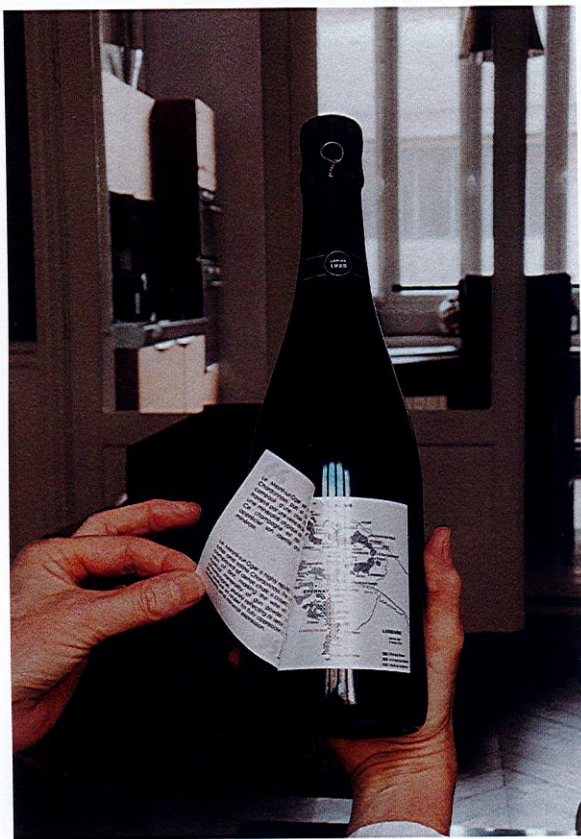


THOMAS LOMBARD PRESENTS A BOTTLE AND THE VINEYARD SITES



CHAMPAGNE TERROIR

A BOOKLET EXPLAINING THE VINEYARD SITES AT CHAMPAGNE LOMBARD



CELEBRATION OF THE CENTENARY ANNIVERSARY AT COGEVI 7-8 OCT 21



from his grandfather's era. There are no mandatory requirements but Maison Lombard takes a very proactive role. "Obviously, we buy grapes", he points out, "and not wines. We conduct soil surveys, discuss the ripeness of the fruit and are on site during harvesting. Prices are on the increase and securing new partnerships is challenging because competition is fierce".

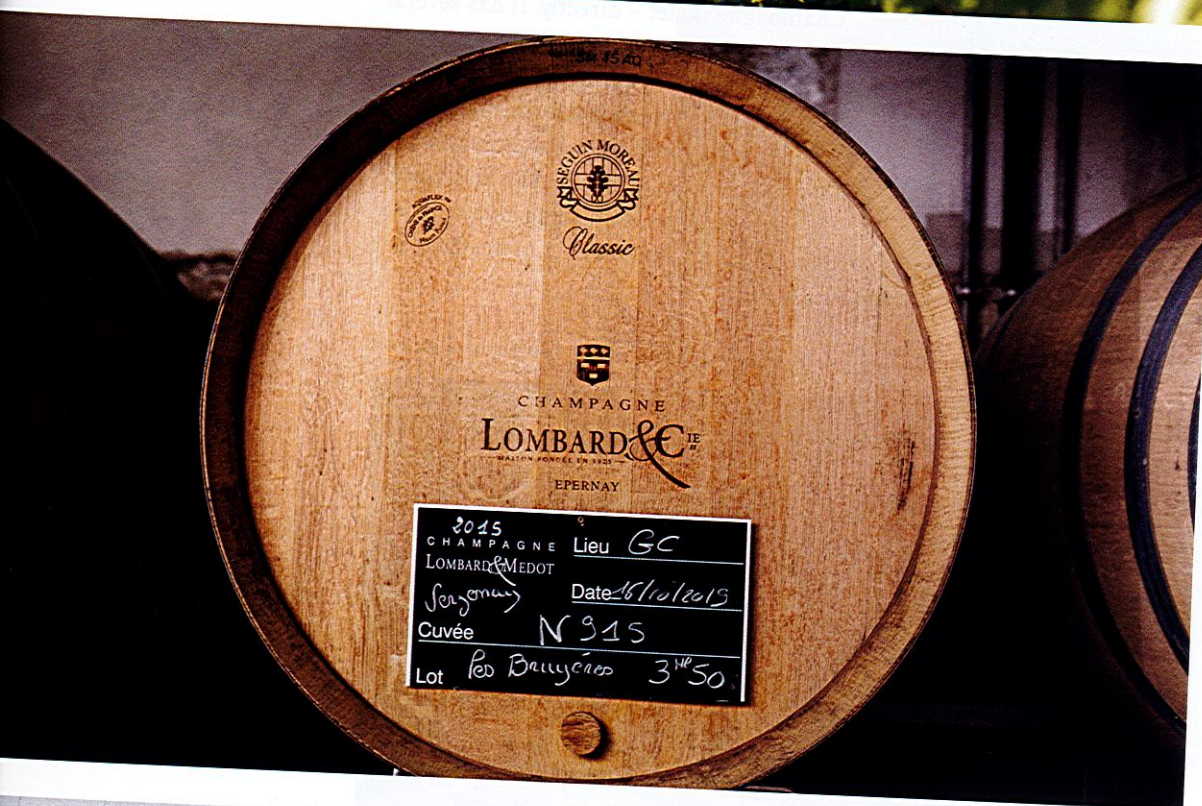
Lombard believes that the essence of a Grand Cru is the consistent quality of the grapes, from one vintage to another. The vines are less prone to adverse weather, due to the chalky sub-soils. The Lombards craft every style of Grand Cru Champagne – from blends of several villages and single-growth labels from just one village to single-vineyard Champagnes. The closer you get to single-vineyard offerings, the more likely the audience will feature wine enthusiasts, sommeliers or winegrowers themselves. This paves the way for extensive maturation periods and consequently, no dosage, which produces saline and iodine-like notes on the finish. The winery has made it its mission to be transparent with its customers and its labels feature a plethora of information, from the vineyard site and harvest date to bottling and disgorgement dates and dosage in grams of sugar. There is sometimes even a map so that the vineyard blocks can be identified! Exports account for approximately half of volumes and demand for Grands Crus Champagnes is highest in countries such as Italy, Germany, Japan, Denmark and Singapore.

Aÿ AND EPERNAY CHAMPAGNE COLLET

The house is presented to us by sales director Carl Cercellier accompanied by product manager Elena Lapie. Champagne Collet is in fact the brand name of a very large co-operative winery – the Coopérative Générale des Vignerons, or Cogevi, which has 850 member growers farming 850 hectares of vines mostly around Aÿ and Epernay. The co-operative embraces a total 167 villages, 17 of them classified as Grand Cru. Cercellier goes back over the



THOMAS LOMBARD IN HIS VINEYARD



A BARREL IN THE CELLAR AT CHAMPAGNE LOMBARD



VILLA COLLET