

French Kiss

Fall in love with an unforgettable Champagne.

By Jan Walsh

Photography by Gustafson

One never forgets her first love—mine was French. One sip, and I was seduced. It was a white Bordeaux, chilled to perfection on a warm, summer's day at a flower-lined, sidewalk café in Nice. The memory and the love affair continued with various vintages of fabulous, French wines across the Riviera, into Paris and—of course, Champagne. Afterwards I returned home, quite the Francophile, drinking nothing but French wines whenever possible. Eventually my heart was touched, and my palate intrigued, by many fine still and sparkling wines of various wine regions all over the world. Yet does one ever get really get beyond her first love? Men, of course, but wine... not so much.

The House of Salon, in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger in the Cote des Blancs produces only one Champagne—the Cuvee "S." This single grand cru is made of a single grape variety (Chardonnay) and produced only in exceptional vintages, typically three to five per decade. The vines are 40-years-old. The juice comes from the cuvee (first pressing). The wine ages eight to ten years in Salon's chalk cellars. Bottles are hand riddled. And the wine is hand disgorged only when an order is received.

Didier Depond, Salon's managing director, suggests lightly chilling the Champagne in a bucket of ice and water for 15 minutes and serving at 55 to 60 degrees in a tulip glass, rather than a flute. "Because of the richness and complexity of its aromas, and its exceptional, lingering finish, we've found that Salon can be drunk in the same way as a great wine. This style of glass allows the wine to breath more efficiently," Depond explains.

The Salon Brut Blanc de Blanc Le Mesnil 1996 is pale yellow with a hint of green in color, clear and lively with fine persistent bubbles. On the nose it exhibits green apple evolving to lemon, grapefruit, pear and kiwi. Complex, powerful and exceptional, the wine exhibits Salon's signature elegance, finesse, balance, depth and fine persistent mousse. This very rare wine can be found at Village Wine Market and will be ordered upon request at Pleasure Is All Wine and Vintage Wine Shoppe. Pair with your soul mate. Or cellar the 1996 vintage for 10, 20 or more years and open for a special anniversary.

Can't wait, or can't afford? The House of Delamotte, founded in 1760, is a sister winery to Salon. It sits beside the Salon property and is also run by Depond. All of the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes in their NV brut come from Grand Cru vineyards. And in years when Salon does not

declare a vintage, Delamotte inherits the entire harvest of wines produced, but not used, by Salon. Delamotte Brut NV (\$44) is a beautiful Champagne with a presence all its own—powerful yet pleasantly fruity with a long persistent stream of fine bubbles, fresh and crisp with hints of apple, pears and lemon. Delamotte is available at Village Wine Market and can be special ordered at Pleasure Is All Wine and Vintage Wine Shoppe.

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