

## Champagne Soutiran, Ambonnay

*“Alain Soutiran, excellent récoltant d’Ambonnay...”*

The 2005 Classification of the Best Wines of France, Bettane & Desseauve



In 1927, France's INAO (*Institut National des Appellations d'Origine*) classified the top crus of Champagne. Of the 324 villages in the region, only 17 were granted grand cru status. Ambonnay, snug in the lee of the *Montagne de Reims*, was classed grand cru because of the quality of its Pinot Noir. Its 750 acres of vines grow on the rolling south-southeast facing foothills, giving them excellent exposure in what is France's most northern appellation. "No where else in Champagne can Pinot Noir attain the same perfection as on the exceptional hills of Ambonnay," writes Michel Bettane.

In 1970, Ambonnay's young Alain Soutiran took the daring step of making and bottling his own Champagne. No longer satisfied with selling the family grapes to the huge cooperative, he set up shop, and began fashioning some of Ambonnay's finest full-bodied Champagnes.

Today, Alain farms 21 acres of vines averaging 33 years of age and he works without pesticides or chemical fertilizers. In addition, he buys grand cru fruit from 32 acres owned by family members in Ambonnay, whose vineyards he oversees. The rosé excepted, all of his wines are made with a portion of reserve wine aged in older Burgundy barrels. His grand cru brut, made from 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay, is a mouth-filling wine packed with flavor. His grand cru blanc de blancs is made from Ambonnay Chardonnay and as such is an uncommonly large-scale blanc des blancs, in contrast to the austere and often sweet examples from the *Côtes des Blancs*. In good years he makes a grand cru *saignée* rosé from Pinot Noir vines planted in the 1950s. This is no shy, pale rosé, but rather a vibrantly colored, intensely flavored wine (one that the November 15, 2004 Wine Spectator rated 92 points, second only to Krug rosé and two points above the far more expensive Billecart-Salmon rosé). Production averages 750 cases annually, and it is best drunk young. His vintage wine is full, rich and nutty, while holding terrific focus. In addition to his rosé, Alain's purest expression of Ambonnay Pinot Noir is the Perle Noire (black pearl) *blanc de noirs*. This takes Ambonnay's inherent richness to a rare level of refinement, combining power with fabulous finesse.

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