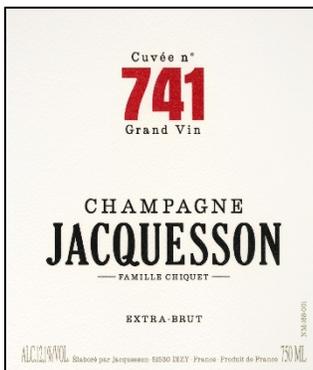


Champagne Jacquesson Dizy



We have here the best that Champagne can produce in terms of wines of terroir with distinctive personalities.

--The Best Wines of France 2018, La Revue du Vin de France



Memmie Jacquesson founded his Champagne business in 1798 and did so well that Napoleon gave him a medal. In 1835, his son Adolphe took over and had a direct hand in several important innovations. He instituted the radical notion of training vines in rows with the collaboration of Dr. Guyot. He established a base level of sugar in bottles with the aid of a chemist, thus substantially reducing the problem of bottle explosion. Lastly, he patented the wire basket known as the *muselet*, still used today to hold sparkling wine corks in place.

The business left family hands toward the end of the 1800s, and eventually was bought by the Chiquet family in 1974. Today Jacquesson is jointly managed by Jean-Hervé and Laurent Chiquet. Jean-Hervé, once the cellar master, now primarily runs the commercial aspects of the business, while his younger brother Laurent runs the production side and has taken the role of chef de cave. The two work closely with their vineyard manager, Sylvain Leblanc. In a given year, Champagne Jacquesson farms between 69 and 76 acres in the grand cru villages of Aÿ, Avize, and Oiry, and in the premier cru villages of Hautvillers, Dizy, and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ. The acres vary because the house owns 69 acres with the option to take farming contracts on as many as 7 more, and Jacquesson does all of the farming on whatever it contracts for. In addition, from these same villages the Chiquets have buying contracts to buy grapes from 20 acres from growers with whom they work closely (it was 27 acres until 2008, when they parted from their largest grower in a step toward self-sufficiency). In Champagne terminology, it would be more accurate to call Jacquesson a large grower rather than a "house" because 80% of its production comes from its own vines.

Sustainable farming practices are the norm here, and one-third of Jacquesson's vineyards are certified organic. No herbicide is used, and two-thirds of the vines are tilled while one-third is sown with cover crops. When fertilizers are used, they are entirely organic. Pruning is severe for low yields, there are no green harvests, and canopy management is stressed to ensure minimal mildew and odium pressure, thus holding fungicide sprays to two each year.

Jacquesson has a small production facility in Dizy, across the river from Epernay. Here the brothers use vertical presses rather than more abusive horizontal presses. Only juice from the first pressing is used—the press wine itself is sold to *négociants*—and of course all the juice is either from grand cru or premier

cru rated vineyards. The juice flows by gravity into steel tanks for 24 hours of settling, after which it is transferred to large neutral wood casks (*foudres*) for several months to undergo alcoholic and malolactic fermentations. The initial fermentation is normally spontaneous while secondary ferments are sometimes spontaneous, sometimes inoculated (with neutral Champagne yeast that originally came from Cramant and Chouilly). The lees are stirred twice monthly to enrich the wine, a practice that has the additional benefit of providing a naturally reductive environment, keeping the need for SO₂ additions to a minimum—one at pressing and another at disgorgement. The first racking normally occurs in April or May.

Malolactic fermentation is never blocked because 1) this would require a lot of SO₂; and 2) low acidity in Champagne grapes is not a concern this far north—the 49th parallel, which is the border between the USA and Canada, runs just above Avize on the Côte des Blancs! Starting with the 2016 vintage, élevages go for twelve months, meaning that the wine is put into bottle to age *sur latte* after the next harvest. Since the fruit that makes the wine always attains an enviable level of ripeness, the dosage is typically in the extra-brut range of one to six grams of sugar per liter. Bottling is done without cold stabilization or filtration. Care is taken with the labels to transparently detail all relevant information about the wine without marketing flourishes. (Jacquesson helped pioneer such honest and unadorned back labels). The house produces between 25,000 and 28,000 cases of wine each year.

So much for the practical aspects. Philosophically, the Chiquet brothers have embarked on a mission to make Champagne as fine wine. This has involved a twofold approach: a fundamental reconsideration of their non-vintage wine, and a move toward single-vineyard wines in an exploration of specific terroirs.

In 2003 Jacquesson jettisoned its Brut Perfection NV in favor of a new non-vintage wine named Cuvée 728 (the number comes from the year 1898, when the house revamped its administration and began keeping new records of every wine it made, beginning with number 1). Cuvée 728 was the first in a series of non-vintage wines whose identities are grounded in the primary vintage of their composition. This sounds straightforward, but it goes directly against the grain of the prevailing concept that a house's non-vintage wine should be a consistent product without regard for differences in years. The aim of the 7-series is to emphasize the best qualities of a given year, rather than to dumb down individual vintages in an effort to make a uniform non-vintage. It's worth noting that this series is being aged progressively longer in bottle, so that by the time Cuvée 734 was released in May 2010 it had a full three years of bottle age, including four months after disgorgement.

The 7-series then led the brothers to question their classic vintage Champagne. Like most houses, the classic vintage was made only in the best years and was intended to be the best blended wine of the house in those years. But Jean-Hervé and Laurent had decided that the 7-series would be Jacquesson's best blended wine. Thus the decision was taken that the 2002 Millésime would be the final vintage bottling of the house. Going forward, the vintage wines would be limited to the four single-vineyard wines, made only in good years and in very limited numbers, while the house's one blend would be the 7-series. The requirements for the vintage-dated single vineyards are simple: the wine must have a distinct personality, one that reflects its terroir, and it is not needed in the 7-series blend.

Today, the 7-series represents roughly 95% of Jacquesson's production. The vineyard sources have essentially remained the same since the advent of this series: parcels in the Marne Valley and along the Côte des Blancs growing in the grands and premiers crus communes of Aÿ, Dizy, Hautvillers, Avize, and Oiry. The basis has long been Chardonnay with roughly 20-25% each of Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir. As John Gillman has observed, it would be more accurate to view the 7-series as a vineyard style rather than as a NV house style.

<http://champagnejacquesson.com/en>