

Champagne Pierre Moncuit

Le Mesnil-sur-Oger



In 1889 Pierre Moncuit and his wife, Odile Moncuit-Delos, established the house of Champagne Pierre Moncuit. Nicole Moncuit grew up in the 1960s and '70s wanting to follow her father in the vines at a time when women just didn't do such things. He said okay, and she put up with the laughter that came from outside the family (even getting a tractor driver's license was an ordeal). Her father was unexpectedly hospitalized during the 1982 vintage--so it became her first, and upon release the wine won a gold medal. In more recent times, Nicole's daughter Valérie joined the domaine to work with her mother.

Mesnil lies smack in the middle of the Côte des Blancs and is its most celebrated village, in no small part because of the vintages of Salon Champagne and the single-vineyard Clos du Mesnil, owned, of course, by Krug. The wines of Mesnil are known above all for steely elegance and minerality, and those Pierre Moncuit—which has some of the oldest vines along the entire Côte—superbly reflect these qualities.

The house farms 20 parcels totaling 37 acres in the grand cru-rated vineyards surrounding the village. These vineyards face east as they climb the Côte's chalk flank, and the majority of the Moncuit vines are 50 years or older. Two parcels, growing in Mesnil's famous Les Chétillion lieu-dit and used in the best years for the vintage-dated Cuvée Nicole Moncuit, are just shy of the centennial birthday. In a region known for replanting vines before they reach their third decade to ensure vigorous production, these old vines represent a rare patrimony.

Another unusual bent in the Moncuit way of doing things is that no reserve wine is used in its production. All of its wines are made from a single year, regardless if they are labeled non-vintage or labeled with a vintage. The non-vintage wines spend three years on their lees before disgorgement; the vintage wines spend between six and eight years on their lees. After disgorgement, the former age another three months before release while the latter spend another six months in the house's cellar before going to market.

In order to keep focus on purity and minerality, no wood is used during the *élevage*. Malolactic fermentation is the norm here. At bottling, the usual dosage for the classic range is normally 6-7 grams of sugar per liter (which stands in contrast to the more standard 12 grams employed by the majority of the Côte's growers, who tend to disgorge earlier). In addition, the family has been producing more extra brut cuvée Delos and non-dosé vintage wine--something Nicole has long favored but felt that the market had wanted the classical wines. Now, you have the choice. Annual production averages 180,000 bottles, or 15,000 12-pack cases, and includes roughly 10,000 bottles of rosé Champagne. No business is conducted with *négociants* either to purchase or to sell juice.

About the bottles themselves, a lavender capsule signifies a good vintage; a gold capsule signifies an exceptional vintage (this as judged by Nicole and Valérie). And the crest on the label is a reference to Nicole and Yves' father, who was an officer in the French Air Force.

www.pierre-moncuit.fr