

The Successful Collector – By Julian Hitner

~ Blanc de Blancs – my favourite type of champagne ~
Saturday, November 26th, 2011

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Chardonnay only:

Crafted solely from Chardonnay, Blanc de Blancs is my favourite type of champagne. Built around the well-established notion that Chardonnay contributes finesse, delicacy, freshness, texture, and style to the blend—



remembering that most champagne is a combination of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier—Blanc de Blancs, while perhaps not as richly structured or fruit-oriented as some might prefer, constitutes the greatest features I adore in champagne.



So how should top quality Blanc de Blancs taste, of which the best grapes hail from the Côte des Blancs, just south of Épernay? While generalizations are easier to summarize than specifics, most experienced champagne drinkers will often detect aromas of profound yeasty biscuits, or even French toast if they're fortunate enough, at the outset. Typically, in Blanc de Blancs, this should gently subside to reveal a vast array of different notes related to green fruits, citrus

elements, exotic spices, and delicate nuts, also sometimes truffles—all extremely pure yet agile at the same time. Indeed, the greatest examples of Blanc de Blancs should always be immensely complex, yet present themselves to the taster in such a way that makes their most important aromas, such as those previously mentioned, easily discernable. In my experience, such is the mark of a truly great Blanc de Blancs.



On the palate, these same aromas, like any other type of wine, should be clearly repeated in the form of detectable flavours. In the case of Blanc de Blancs, however, the main differences to watch out for, such as when comparing it any other type of champagne, are finesse, delicacy, freshness, texture, and style. Perhaps a comparison will add light to the issue: Salon versus Krug. Compared to the Krug Grande Cuvée, which will often taste weightier, deeper, and ever-so slightly more fruit-driven (courtesy of the

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Chardonnay being typically outweighed by the two Pinots), and rounder—the result, among other things, of being a multi-grape blend—a glass of Salon will typically possess a greater degree of purity and expression from being crafted solely from Chardonnay. Such characteristics, I would submit, are best discovered when analysing the features previously mentioned.

As for aging potential, a bottle of premium Blanc de Blancs should have little trouble keeping for several decades, depending on the preference of the collector. Like other types of champagne, an old bottling of Blanc de Blancs will often remind one of an old white Burgundy, perhaps even (still) slightly effervescent. Seriously, what could be better?

[Click here for a few gems from the 26 November 2011 Vintages Release and other items](#)

A few gems for collectors:

White Wines:

Kistler 2009 Sonoma Mountain Chardonnay, Sonoma Mountain (Sonoma Valley), California: While a shade off from previous vintages, the 2009 Sonoma Mountain Chardonnay nonetheless remains an excellent wine for collectors in search of the Burgundian style. Starbright, light greenish-lime in colour, it boasts marvellous, albeit more tropical, nuances of ripe pears that shortly give way to quince, chalk, caramel, lemon, orange peel, and a beautiful trace of apricots, minerals, and spice. Very complex, with superb fruit, balanced acidity, and a polished hint of pears and quince (very subtle) on the finish. Definitely rounder and slightly more tropical in approach; still a winner in my books. Now-2018++. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, October 2011)

91++ \$72.95 (#183921) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Stratus 2009 Gewürztraminer, VQA Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Peninsula, Canada: One of a handful of single-varietal dry whites I have ever tasted from Stratus—each of them infinitely superior to their ridiculous, clumsy white blend of too many grapes. Starbright, light lime in colour, the 2009 Gewürztraminer offers truly beautiful scents of slightly tropical peaches, lychees, ginger, jasmine, lemon, poached pears, kiwi, and spice. Complex, with round, gentle yet engaging fruit, balanced acidity, and a lingering, polished hint of slightly tropical peaches, lychees, and kiwi on the finish. Definitely a first-rate wine, offering great refinement, balance, and roundness. Now-2018+. (Julian Hitner, *The Successful Collector*, October 2011)

90+ \$32.20 (#251447) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Domaine Vincent Delaporte 2010 Chavignol, Sancerre AOC, Loire, France: When I see 'Chavignol' on the label (the heartland of Sancerre), I am trustful that the wine is made from particularly good grapes; this seems to pan out with Delaporte. Starbright, very pale lime in colour, the 2010 vintage displays lovely, almost seasalty, scents of lemon, gooseberries, green apples, minerals, and a trace of chalk. Palate: fine, vibrant fruit and acidity, ending with a delightful hint of minerally lemon (plus a few gooseberries)

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on the finish. Very crisp, proper, and delicate—refreshing stuff. Now-2013+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

88 \$23.95 (#251488) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Windsor 2008 Sonoma Chardonnay, Russian River Valley (Sonoma County), California: For the type of style on display here, one with plenty of oak influence, this is indeed a good wine. Starbright, light greenish-lime in colour, the 2008 Sonoma Chardonnay comfortably reveals engaging scents of toasted oak, butterscotch, ripe pears and apricots, lemon blossom, nuts, and orange peel. Reasonably complex, with fine fruit, slightly milder acidity, and a round hint of pears and toasted oak on the finish. Easily appreciable, well made for its type. Now-2016. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

88 \$24.95 (#145219) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Red Wines:

Pahlmeyer 2007 Proprietary Red, Napa Valley, California: A stunning Bordeaux blend of incredible allure, structure, and pristine behaviour, the 2007 Proprietary Red is indeed a decisively glorious wine. Brilliant, opaque purple-ruby in colour, it is outstandingly toasted, displaying diverse aromas of currants, crushed flowers, blackberries, smoke, charcoal, barbecue, crushed rocks, incense, forest floor, vanilla, and spice. Amazingly complex, boasting magnificent forward, finely structured fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a long-lasting, glorious hint of currants and crushed flowers on the finish. Definitely massive (15.2% alcohol) in focus, yet this extraordinary wine seems to have no trouble holding it all together with complete and utter ease; a wine for the long haul. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot, and 1% Malbec. Now-2030++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

94++ \$132.95 (#967992) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Dunn Vineyards 2007 Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, Howell Mountain (Napa Valley), California: One of the most elegant wines co-owners Randy and Lori Dunn have released in years, the 2007 Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon is a stupendously Bordeaux-inspired bottling of extraordinary elegance and enticement. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour, the wine features wonderful aromas of currants, blackberries, light mocha, graphite, forest floor, crème de cassis, leather, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with excellent, completely refined fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an ultra-elegant, enticing hint of delicate mocha, currants, and pencil lead on the finish. At a comparatively moderate 13.8% alcohol, the perfect example of a wine where less is more—so elegant! Now-2026++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

94 \$96.95 (#193763) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Peter Michael 2006 L'Esprit des Pavots, Knights Valley (Sonoma County), California: The 'second wine' of Sir Peter Michael's fabulous winery, the 2006 L'Esprit des Pavots is a Bordeaux blend of unequivocal excellence, allure, and (even) elegance. Brilliant, virtually opaque ruby in colour, the wine is beautifully toasted, offering rich, refined aromas of milk chocolate, dried currants and plums, pain grille, subtle pencil shavings, licorice, underbrush, and an amazing hint of vanilla and spice. Truly complex,

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with superlatively forward, finely structured fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a powerful, utterly delicious hint of milk chocolate, dried currants, and minerals on the finish. Powerfully built at 15.5% alcohol, one might reasonably describe this wine as a 'blockbuster,' yet a certain elegance seems to stand out here that simply cannot be ignored. 45% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 17% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot. Now-2032++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

94 \$144.95 (#154732) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Far Niente 2008 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California: For the past several years, the Far Niente Estate Cabernet Sauvignon seems to be getting better and better, inching it ever closer into pantheon of Napa Valley greats. Take the 2008 vintage: brilliant, opaque purple-ruby in colour, the wine is outstandingly toasted (with even a sort-of reservedness about it), exhibiting unfailingly inviting aromas of slightly fragrant currants and mocha/espresso, blackberries, blueberries, incense, tar, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, delivering magnificent, finely textured forward fruit, firm tannins, milder acidity, and a glorious, lasting hint of currants and delicate incense on the finish. A wine of amazing dexterity, power, and individualism. Also contains 6% Petit Verdot and 4% Cabernet Franc. Now-2030+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93++ \$132.95 (#539098) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Tenuta San Guido 2008 Sassicaia, Bolgheri Sassicaia DOC, Tuscany, Italy: One of the most iconic wines of Italy, the 2008 Sassicaia is a near-masterpiece of finesse, layering, and structure. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine is beautifully toasted, with alluringly refined aromas of delicate, mocha-laden black cherries and plums, pain grille, licorice, forest floor, subtle herbs, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, though perhaps on the verge of shutting down, delivering exquisitely structured yet almost silky fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a terrifically refined hint of cherries and (mild) hot chocolate on the finish. One of the most elegant bottlings crafted in quite a while, and all the finer for it. 85% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Cabernet Franc. Now-2028+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93++ \$186.95 (#480533) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Château Pontet-Canet 2008, Pauillac AOC, Bordeaux, France: Make no mistake: the 2008 Pontet-Canet represents an outrageously profound effort for the vintage; a wine of exemplary structure, finesse, and breed. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, it starts out enticingly toasted, offering abundant, alluring aromas of dark mocha/espresso, currants, blackberries, blueberries, licorice, graphite, and a magnificent hint of crushed flowers, vanilla, and spice. Truly complex, with outstanding fruit, firm and well-structured tannins, balanced acidity, and a sincerely refined, lingering hint of silky currants, charcoal, and licorice on the finish. Year after year these days, one cannot say enough about the efforts of owner Alfred Tesseron and his team. 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 1% Petit Verdot. Now-2026++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93++ \$129.00 (#137323) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Château de Beaucastel 2009, Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, Rhône, France: When compared to the '08, there is no question that the 2009 Château de Beaucastel is the superior, more opulent vintage—a true collector's wine. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in

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colour (with a touch of purple), it exhibits wonderful, textbook 'Beaucastel' aromas of slightly peppery blackberries and dark, incense-infused raspberries, lavender, pain grille, leather, Provençal herbs, and a hint of licorice and spice; also a little barnyard. Very complex, boasting exquisite fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a youthfully confident, elegant hint of lavender and plums on the finish. Extraordinary Châteauneuf of absolute precision, structure, and strength. 30% Grenache, 30% Mourvèdre, 10% Syrah, 10% Counoise, the rest all the other permitted varietals of the appellation. Now-2030++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93+ \$89.95 (#711317) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Beringer 1997 Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California: Arguably the best vintage from the late-1990s, the Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon has always been the star offering from the Beringer stable; a clear cut above so many of their other, far less significant wines. Brilliant, dark-opaque garnet in colour, the '97 is aging gorgeously, with near-Bordelais aromas of dried currants and blackberries, cedar, cigar box, forest floor, roasted meats, smoke, leather, and spice. Very complex, offering marvellous fruit, (still-) firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a glorious hint of cedary cigar box and dried currants on the finish. Superbly elegant at 13.9% alcohol, maturing beautifully, and downright delicious. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93 \$119.95 (#552851) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Henschke 2005 Mount Edelstone Shiraz, Keyneton (Eden Valley), Australia: The second time I have tasted this wine in as many years, the deluxe 2005 Mount Edelstone represents a remarkable Shiraz from one of the greatest winegrowing operations in Australia. Brilliant, opaque ruby in colour with a touch of red currant, it features wonderful aromas of seasoned eucalyptus and meaty currants that shortly give way to toasted oak, mocha, leather, underbrush, spicebox, cream, vanillin, and smoke. Sincerely complex, with gloriously forward, almost silky fruit, supple tannins, milder acidity, and a lasting, polished hint of eucalyptus, baked plums, and creamy milk chocolate on the finish. Exceptional, inviting, balanced, and characterful. Screwcap closure. Now-2025+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93 \$99.95 (#718601) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Masi 2004 Campolongo di Torbe, Amarone della Valpolicella DOC, Veneto, Italy: One of two premium single-vineyard wines from the Masi stable, the 2004 Campolongo di Torbe continues to amaze in terms of sumptuousness, depth, and evolution. Brilliant, opaque red currant in colour, the wine reveals resplendent aromas of cedary baker's chocolate, red plums, undergrowth, wild game, delicate savoury herbs, hickory, leather, and spice. Very complex, with superlative, slowly evolving fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and an extremely well-structured hint of cedary/savoury baker's chocolate and plums on the finish. Absolutely delicious and powerful, logging in at 16% alcohol. It keeps on going from strength to strength. 70% Corvina, 25% Rondinella, and 5% Molinara. Now-2020++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

93 \$99.95 (#548677) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Justin Vineyards 2007 Isosceles, Paso Robles, California: Tasted at a marvellous get-together at a local LCBO outlet, the 2007 Isosceles is quite possibly the best vintage

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owner Justin Baldwin has ever cobbled together. Brilliant, dark-opaque ruby in colour, the wine, finely toasted at the outset, offers beautiful aromas of mocha (slightly meat-infused), accompanied by currants, Oreo cookies, baked wild cherries, graphite, vanilla, and spice. Very complex, with rounder, delectably approachable fruit and tannins (still quite firm), milder acidity, and a lasting hint of mocha, currants, and toasted French oak on the finish. A Bordeaux blend of exceptional flavour, polish, and strength. 88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Cabernet Franc, and 4% Merlot. Now-2020. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, December 2010)

92++ \$73.95 (#684282) Vintages Archives

Silvio Nardi 2005, Brunello di Montalcino DOCG, Tuscany, Italy: Tremendous value for a premium wine, the 2005 Silvio Nardi is an outstanding Brunello from an otherwise 'mixed bag' of a vintage. Brilliant, dark red currant-garnet in colour, the wine reveals truly beautiful, traditional-style aromas of earth-driven cherries and plums, cedarwood, undergrowth, rosewood, balsam, and a hint of vanilla, roasted meat, and spice. Very complex, with superb, well-structured fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a sincerely elegant hint of cherries and cedarwood on the finish. Excellent for its type, offering real finesse, breadth, and focus. Now-2020+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

92 \$41.95 (#922054) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Palliser 2009 Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand: More than just straightforward, run-of-the-mill berry-infused Marlborough Pinot Noir, the 2009 Palliser is unmistakably something better, fuller, and more refined. Brilliant, dark ruby in colour, the wine reveals rich, elegant aromas of blackberries, currants, cherries, strawberry preserves, pain grille, and a lovely hint of wild flowers and spice. Complex, with beautiful fruit, fine tannins, balanced acidity, and an elegant yet fleshier hint of red cherried currants on the finish. Very impressive and silky, delivering balance and substance in the proper amounts. Screwcap closure. Now-2016. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

90 \$29.95 (#120766) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Domaine Sergent 2008 Oak Aged, Madiran AOC, Southwest, France: The latest example of how far Madiran, once one of the most inaccessible wines of France, has progressed. Brilliant, opaque purple-ruby in colour, the 2008 Domaine Sergent 'Oak Aged' reveals lovely, youthful aromas of minty currants and plums, blackberries, dried mocha, crushed rocks, incense, and a hint of vanilla and spice. Complex, with very fine fruit, very firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a splendid, robust hint of minty currants and crushed rocks on the finish. Seriously well done: finely structured, balanced, and poised. Now-2018+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

89 \$19.95 (#251561) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Valiano Poggio Teo 2006, Chianti Classico DOCG, Tuscany, Italy: Always a pleasure to come across a well priced, delightfully made Chianti Classico. Brilliant, dark red currant (with a touch of garnet) in colour, the 2006 Valiano Poggio Teo reveals gently cedary, more traditional notes of dried cherries, leather, mild herbs, and spice. On the palate: very decent fruit showing, with fine tannins, balanced acidity, and a splendid hint of dried cherries on the finish. On the whole, a wine that is very easy to like, and one that is even easier to approach. Now-2016+. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

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88 \$17.95 (#250563) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Sparkling Wine:

Krug NV Grande Cuvée Brut, Champagne, France: My second (or third) note for the Krug Grand Cuvée in 2011, each new tasting note serves as a valuable reminder of how stupendous this particular champagne is. This recording: starbright, pale-light greenish-straw in colour, as alluring and decadent as ever, exhibiting sensational scents of resounding spice-infused French toast, white flowers, lime, biscuits, ginger, jasmine, vanilla, pistachios, minerals, and grapefruit. Extremely complex, with mesmerizingly pure, polished fruit, excellent acidity, and an outstanding, lasting hint of French toast and Asian spice on the finish. Simply put, at least to me, a champagne of unbelievable structure, finesse, style, and richness. The ultimate non-vintage collector's bubbly! Now-2032++ (much longer than previous estimates). (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

95++ \$269.95 (#38562) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Nicolas Maillart Vintage 2005 Premier Cru Brut, Champagne, France: Likely the first champagne I have tasted from Maillart, leaving an excellent impression for all those concerned. Starbright, pale straw in colour, the 2005 Premier Cru is finely toasted, with a touch of minerally lemon at the outset that lends itself to seriously splendid scents of yeasty biscuits, white grapefruit and flowers, brioche, and a hint of vanilla wafers and spice. Complex, with excellent crispness, structure of fruit, poised acidity, and a superb hint of creamy brioche and delicate lemon on the finish. Adeptly superior, delicious vintage champagne. Pinot Noir (predominant) and Chardonnay. Now-2018. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

91 \$52.45 (#245894) 26 November 2011 Vintages Release

Bonville NV Prestige Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut, Champagne, France: An older note, for a champagne unquestionably worth seeking out—provided it's still somewhere obtainable. Starbright, pale lime in colour, the wine is beautifully toasted, with exciting scents of fresh yeasty biscuits infused with lime, lemon, brioche, pears, and a lovely hint of cream and spice. Complex, with truly fine fruit and acidity, ending with an impressive, elegant hint of biscuity pears on the finish. Beautiful Blanc de Blancs, from a producer that doesn't get nearly as much credit as it deserves. Now-2018. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, April 2010)

90 \$51.45 (#908293) Vintages 29 August 2009 Release

Fortified Wine:

Dow's 1985 Vintage Port, Douro DOC, Portugal: From an extremely respectable, if not underrated, vintage of the 1980s, the 1985 Dow's is a terrific port that seems to be aging with a sort-of ease that perplexingly eludes most living persons. Brilliant, opaque red currant in colour, the wine exhibits a wonderful bouquet of slightly savoury black plums, forest floor, leather, kirsch, cassis, dates, figs, spicebox, and a hint of herbs. Very complex, with beguiling fruit, firm tannins, balanced acidity, and a near-glorious hint of black fruits (slightly savoury) on the finish. Overall, an excellent, ever-evolving, superlative fortified wine—ideal for collectors in need of vintage ports not requiring substantial aging. Now-2030. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

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93 \$91.95 (#745836) Vintages 26 November 2011 Release

Grant Burge 10 Year Old Tawny, Barossa, Australia: While the best Australian fortified wines usually hail from Rutherglen (northeast Victoria), great examples can be found in most other regions, as well. Brilliant, medium tawny in colour with a trace of brown, the Grant Burge 10 Year Old Tawny reveals decisively decadent notes of English toffee, brown sugar, caramel, maderized trace elements, Danish pastries, walnuts, and plenty of spice. Complex, with delicious, unfailingly alluring sweet fruit, balanced acidity, and an exceptional, lingering hint of toffee and walnuts on the finish. Marvellously done: so full of flavour, vitality, and length. Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Shiraz. Now-2035++. (Julian Hitner, The Successful Collector, October 2011)

91++ \$30.95 (#58388) Vintages 26 November 2011 Release