

Jean VESSELLE

Bouzy

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Delphine Vesselle



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France

CHAMPAGNE
Montagne de Reims

OVERVIEW

When your family heritage in one town extends back more than three centuries, it will come to pass that, for better or worse, some of your history will resurface. In the 'better' column of the Vesselles of Bouzy, we find that when Jean Vesselle was excavating to install a new press in the late '80s, he unearthed a trove of wines more than 50 years old marked "Œil de Perdrix." The wines (which were *still sparkling*), with their pale, Pre-Raphaelite tint and wondrous aromas and flavors, were a mystery to local producers. A little research showed Vesselle that *Œil de Perdrix*, a Blanc de Noir with a delicate amber-pink-hue, was once the unique style of Bouzy, so he revived the tradition under a label that mirrors those on the bottles he found. In 1993, Vesselle's gifted daughter Delphine took over full-time. Under her care, the wines have a magnified expression of *terroir* and clearer stylistic delineation between individual *cuvées*, yet the wines still have the impressionistic sensivity that made them treasured grower Champagnes 25 years ago. In 1995, she created a micro-*cuvée* (which is, alas—at only 75 cases, not available outside Bouzy) with fruit from *Le Petit Clos*, 1/5 of an acre of old vine Pinot Noir growing right in front of the winery, vinified in *barrique* with ambient yeast, no malolactic fermentation, fining or filtration. A marvelous and idiosyncratic wine in the scheme of Champagne (even considering that it is still red wine), but it is a powerful testament to the quality one can achieve in this long-hallowed region.

Varieties: Pinot Noir,
Chardonnay

Total Acreage: 27
acres, 25 of which are in
Grand Cru Bouzy

Average Production:
about 10,000 cases

VINEYARD/CELLAR PRACTICES

- Organically farmed, yields limited by *ébourgeonnage* (early spring de-budding)
- Whole-cluster pressed; primary & malolactic fermentations in stainless steel tank
- Wines spend a minimum of 30 months on lees before disgorgement; *dosages* tend to be quite small (*Œil de Perdrix* gets 5 g/L, upper limit for Brut is 12 g/L)

WINES

Brut Réserve

A delicious, ripe, forward wine that dances with bold red fruitiness and a juicy, persistent finish. 80% Pinot Noir gets a lift from 20% Chardonnay, which focuses the flavors towards plums rather than cherries and elongates the overall profile.

Œil de Perdrix Brut

Not a Rosé, but rather an *Ambré*, this pale salmon-colored wine restores the Bouzy tradition with a generous sensation of high-toned Pinot Noir red fruits that have a crystalline, jellied quality, and a long, cherry-oriented finish stretched thickly over a delicate, chalky minerality.

ACCOLADES

Jean Vesselle Brut Oeil de Perdrix—Made of 100-percent pinot noir, this has a slight hint of pale, pinkish color, echoing the airy, delicately poised aromas of strawberry and raspberry. It's currently based on 2006, demonstrating a fresh and lively vivacity, and its elegant balance makes it feel inviting and fragrantly expressive.

Peter Liem, ChampagneGuide.net

Jean Vesselle Brut Réserve—Light pink-tinged gold. Smoky, seductively perfumed nose displays strawberry, pear, Christmas spices and a hint of vanilla bean. Fresh red berry flavors are complemented by spice cake and smoky minerals, with good mineral snap. The silky finish is impressively energetic and long. This complex Champagne should be flexible with all sorts of lighter foods. **92 points**

Josh Reynolds, International Wine Cellar, #141