

# THE WORLD OF FINE WINE

## Bollinger PN VZ 19: Measured indulgence

A new Pinot Noir cuvée that is as generous as it is satisfying.



**Simon Field MW** enjoys Bollinger PN VZ 19, the latest and, so far, the best instalment of the house's ongoing quest to produce "the apotheosis of a Pinot Noir Champagne."

If any house has the right to chase down the dream of an apotheosis of a Pinot Noir Champagne, then that house should surely be Bollinger. Its kingdom is the Montagne village of Aÿ, after all, and its most celebrated wine is the fantastically rare Vieilles Vignes Françaises.

Bollinger finally decided to broaden the remit in 2010, paving the way for the first in a series of five wines, all rejoicing in a coda of abbreviation. Otherwise, we have had base wines (these are all Non-Vintage blends) from 2015 to 2019, of which three have been focused on Verzenay (2015, 2016, and now 2019), one on Tauxières (2017), and one only on Aÿ itself (2018). All Multi-Vintage, all Pinot Noir, and all rejoicing in plenty of reserve wine, much of it having been aged in magnum under cork. This facet, allied to the flavoring of oak fermentation, has informed a style that is very powerful, very Bollinger, and neatly described by managing director Charles-Armand de Belenet, as "endlessly decadent." Quite.

Something very clever is going on here. The secret lies in the villages themselves, so long undervalued in the Champagne canon; Tauxières and Verzenay in particular selected because they are north- and northeast-facing, have deep and cool, chalky foundations, and impart a natural freshness and linearity to the wines, which sits very well with the more exuberant disposition of the Bollinger style. The late *chef de cave* Gilles Descôtes understood this very well and made sure that both his selection of the "key" village and, almost more important, the reserve wines, all shared a verticality of style that would complement the more generous inclinations of vintages such as 2018 and 2020. The other villages contributing in 2019 include Aÿ, Avenay, Tauxières, Mutigny, and Louvois—none far from Bollinger HQ and all tilting to the structured/elegant end of the spectrum.

# Bollinger PN VZ 19: Bolstered by winter cool

2019 was, to be fair, another hot year, but it was bolstered by a cooler, wetter hinter season, strong diurnal impulses even through the dog days of high summer, and exceptionally benevolent conditions during harvest. As in Bordeaux, 2019 in Champagne seems to be pulling ahead, this example eloquently proving a point. The good work of Descôtes has been picked up seamlessly by current *chef de cave* Denis Bunner, who is far from reticent in his praise of the new release—for him, it is the juxtaposition of “power,” “creaminess,” and “enticing aromas” that immediately seduce.

Such power means that there is no compunction in showcasing the wine with spicy Asian cuisine (at Clap Restaurant in London’s Knightsbridge), where it pirouettes with shrimp tempura, shoyu Chilean sea bass, and pistachio-crusted baby chicken—nothing gastronomically overwhelming... quite the reverse. Our host, family member Cyril Delarue, reminds us that the bicentenary (2029) will celebrate the Aÿ tradition and Pinot Noir. He describes blanc de noirs, as an “empty category” but is sure that the popularity and reputation of wines such as in this PN series will bring long-overdue recognition.

Power and gastronomic versatility are demonstrably impressive; the additional and oh-so-vital subtlety down to both the 52% of reserve wine and the fact that this reserve wine is divided between an older vintage (2009) and the most recent vintage (2018). The almost counterintuitive recognition that both of these were hot years underwrites the fact that this is supposed to be a powerful, rich, and vinous style. It is Bollinger, after all. Yet the vertical delicacy and finely sketched shard of acidity is all down to the latent quality of the 2019 vintage and the art of *assemblage* itself—by virtue of Bunner himself.

Against the 2017 and 2018, the new Bollinger PN VZ 19 shows very well indeed, the 2017 a little anomalous, given its headline village; the 2018, touched by warmer, more forthright Aÿ fruit and the faintest intimations of *de trop*... This was definitely the day for the 2019, the youngest wine and disgorged as recently as March 2024, yet already articulate, resourceful, and long in both the mouth and the memory. The best of the five PNs so far released? I think so.

## Tasting

**Bollinger PN VZ 19** (100% PN; disgorged March 2024; *dosage* 6g/l)

A strong gold and a striking nose of hazelnut, fig, and mirabelle plum. The 2009 reserve wine is already holding sway, the 50% oak fermentation providing eloquent support, too. This is powerful, for sure, with cherry fruit, rosehip, hints of iodine and jasmine, then honeysuckle and a reassuring citric base. Red fruit and the ancestral voice of the reserve wine are very much in the ascendancy here, however, with a rich, velvety texture. Thereafter, the linear character of the palate, with none of the aforementioned fruit character forsaken, lends intellectual impetus, tension, and decorously challenging salinity. The texture is pure and crystalline; Verzenay purity from Verzenay chalk. The Pinot power respects this and dances seamlessly around a bold and honorable structure that is as generous as it is satisfying. If you like *le style Bollinger* and you like Pinot Noir-dominated Champagne, well, guess what... | 95–96