

T H E  
W I N E R Y

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February Tasting *Fulham* 13.02.24  
*featuring* Champagne François Secondé

We are in for an enormous treat: we have not just one Champagne in our line-up but four! Tonight we are joined by **Jérôme Gros Lambert** who has made the champagnes at François Secondé in Sillery on the Montagne de Reims for a decade and a half.

*sparkling*

**Champagne Grand Cru Brut, François Secondé (Champagne/France)**

44.99

*Also available in halves 23.99, magnums 96.99, jeroboams 249.99*

As you sweep southwards along the Autoroute des Anglais, just after Reims on the chalky Montagne de Reims (which is more of a gentle incline than a mountain), you pass the Grand Cru villages of Sillery on your left and Verzenay on your right. François Secondé is the only grower to make a pure Sillery Champagne. François left school at the age of 14 and worked in the vineyards. He bought his first parcel of vines in 1972 and rented others. By 1976 he had 3 hectares and, with the help of his wife, Anne-Marie, started making Champagne. When we first visited François, Anne-Marie and Jérôme, we were taken by the very discreet signposting: a side street in the village, a very small sign on the gate outside a bungalow. Not until you pass behind the house does the much more substantial winery building reveal itself. The tasting room and labelling machine are under the bungalow.

The quality of their Champagnes is outstanding - even this “entry-level” bottling is Grand Cru: 2/3 Pinot Noir, 1/3 Chardonnay. Elegant and refined.



**Les Sermiers 1er Cru Blanc de Blancs, François Secondé (Champagne/France)**

55.99

Jérôme Gros Lambert, who is here tonight, is from Reims. Following his studies he worked in Bergerac and then Vouvray in the Loire valley before moving back to work for a succession of different Champagne producers, large and small. He joined François Secondé in 2009 and was well-established before François’ untimely passing in 2018.

Les Sermiers is a relatively new addition to the range, 100% Chardonnay, beautifully fresh but not bracing. Mouthfilling. Delicious.

**La Loge Grand Cru Blanc de Noirs, François Secondé (Champagne/France)**

58.99

Here it is, 100% Sillery, 100% Pinot Noir from the best parcels of 40 year-old vines. Pure red fruit and brioche in the nose, structured, a wonderful combination of power and finesse.

For several centuries Sillery was best known for its still white wine. In the 1700s, Edme Bégouillet, adviser to the King, notary in Dijon and oenologue, was famous for his dislike of growers in Champagne but spared the wines of Sillery: “their quality is so superior that only the King deserves them”. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, philosopher and influencer in the Age of Enlightenment raved about the wines of Sillery and their onion peel colour. Let’s look out for that colour today!

**Champagne Rosé Brut, François Secondé (Champagne/France)**

49.99

As with most Rosé Champagnes, this is made by blending a still red wine with Blanc de Noirs (the white base wine made by taking the juice off the red skins). You don’t need much red wine for the blend and it’s much easier to get the exact shade of Rosé you want than using the Saignée method, leaving it on the skins and trying to judge the exact moment to separate the juice before it takes too much colour. We adore this Rosé Champagne – it has fruit, freshness and body but is not over-the-top. Very fine and finely-judged.

*red*

**Le Sassine Valpolicella Superiore 2019, Le Ragose (Veneto/Italy) 29.99**

It has taken a couple of years of circling but we now have our first pallet of Valpolicella and Amarone from Le Ragose, the estate built in 1969 at the highest elevation in the area. The road is twisty and narrow and our clutch took a beating. How on earth did they get all the winemaking tanks and large casks up there? How on earth will a lorry get up there to pick up our wine? The answer is that it doesn't. They had to send a smaller vehicle to bring it down. The wines made the climb worthwhile, as did the warm welcome of Paolo Galli and his daughter Marta. When Marta's grandparents, Arnaldo and Marta, started the estate there were 18 growers in the area, today there are 400!

The wines of this corner of Italy, just to the north of Verona gives us a fascinating contrast from light breezy Valpolicella Classico, through succulent Valpolicella Superiore and Ripasso to the famous, heavy Amarone and Recioto, its sweet sibling.

Le Sassine is their Valpolicella Cru, a vineyard at the lowest part of the estate (still higher elevation than everyone else). It's an old vineyard where they found some old indigenous varieties which form 20% of the otherwise classic 50% Corvina, 15% Rondinella and 15% Corvinone blend. It's ripe and full but with a sense of freshness and fluid drinkability.

**Weisserberg Spätburgunder 2021, Walter (Mosel/Germany) 31.99**

Gerrit Walter was an intern with us at The Winery for twelve weeks in the summer of 2009 and went back home to help with the harvest before heading back to finish his studies at Geisenheim, the top Wine University in the country. Gerrit clearly did his homework at Uni and at his various internships - it's easy to understand why his Dad gave him free rein in the family cellar on his return. His basic dry Riesling has been a long-time staple at The Winery.

Like many along the Mosel valley, although 95% of his wine is Riesling, he also makes a small amount of Spätburgunder. Gerrit has always been very interested in Pinot Noir and was particularly keen to taste as much red Burgundy as possible while he interned with us.

Weisserberg (*white hill*) is his top bottling - from a one hectare parcel of Spätburgunder he bought around the time he was with us. He uses old oak, to avoid the oak dominating. Only 400 bottles were made in 2021. Silky, smoky, textured Pinot Noir.



**Rioja Reserva 2018, Longrande (Rioja/Spain) 23.99**

A quarter of a century has passed since we came across Isabel Fernandez's Longrande in the brilliant Casa Toni restaurant in San Vicente de la Sonsierra in Rioja Alta. We had tasted so much mainstream Rioja and her Crianza was a breath of fresh air – a revelation. We had to beg to see her, largely to overcome her fear of export. Fortunately, we were able to convince her to sell to us and her wines have been a fixture on our shelves ever since.

Isabel is as full of personality as her wines. She has been making the wine in her family Bodega in Abalos since 1987. She goes to great lengths to keep the whole process as natural as possible; treading the whole bunches by foot, using gravity to avoid pumping, never filtering. She determines the bottling date biodynamically, according to the cycles of the moon. Her wines are fascinating - sometimes boldly perfumed, with a beautiful purity of fruit and surprising body and structure.

We visited Isabel and her nephew David on our recent trip to Spain. After a big night out in Logroño we met the following morning at the Bodega in Abalos where the Rioja Alta meets the Rioja Alavesa. Despite the sunshine it was very windy and fresh. Isabel says it's always windy in Abalos and that helps the vines, dispersing moisture and protecting against disease. She showed us several of her vineyards, almost entirely 45-130 year-old vines. Later we tasted her Reserva 1994. It was marvellous: mature, alive and well; still fresh with some tannins and very long. Old vines and classical winemaking shine through the more recent vintages and all the way back.

Our following tasting will be at The Winery Maida Vale on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March.

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