



THE  
CHAMPAGNE  
GUIDE 2011

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# J. DUMANGIN FILS

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Everything is done on a different scale at Dumangin. The first thing I noticed when Gilles Dumangin welcomed me into his tiny winery was the size of his tanks, some not much larger than a bar fridge. “A house this size would normally have twenty tanks,” he explained. “I have eighty.” On the day of writing, Gilles put a photograph of his new blending tank on his Facebook page with the caption, “She looks big!” In most champagne houses I’ve visited, that tank would barely compare with their smallest.

The diminutive scale of this operation is precisely as fifth-generation chef de cave Gilles and his father Jacky would have it. A production of just 150,000 bottles permits an attention to detail more fanatical than any I have seen in Champagne. These are hand-made champagnes, with every step in the process performed manually, including riddling (by transfer between pallets). Every shipment of non-vintage wine that leaves the cellar is disgorged to order, with the dosage tweaked from its usual 10g/L sugar to suit. “From my tests, the wines stay fresher if they’re disgorged just prior to shipment,” Gilles explained. It’s different in the case of the vintage wines, which he finds hold their freshness best if disgorged three to four years after bottling. Dumangin was one of the first in champagne to seal everything with DIAM cork. “In my trials, the wines keep fresher under DIAM,” he said.

Wines are handled with the utmost care from picking to bottling. Gilles is proud of his old Coquart press and was excited to find another one recently, albeit more expensive than a new press. “It’s so gentle,” he explained, “that the pips stay on the skins and the seeds remain inside!”

Based in the romantic little village of Chigny-les-Roses, where Gilles’ grandfather built the school, the estate sources from just five hectares of premier cru vineyards from this and surrounding villages. This is pinot country, and both pinots feature heavily in the Dumangin style. Chardonnay finds its place, too, and the local quality is more than respectable. “Chigny-les-roses produces very fine grapes in all three varieties,” according to Gilles.



My tasting at Dumangin was the most comprehensive and instructive of my time in Champagne this year. Spanning fifteen vintages, vins clairs (unblended still wines), blended base wines, single varieties, single vineyards, late disgorged, oaked and unoaked, there was not a permutation left unconsidered. The chance to examine every piece of the puzzle in intricate detail provided a remarkable insight into these blends and why it is that Dumangin makes some of the best value small producer champagnes going.

Pinot meunier is more important here than it is in most champagne houses. “This is the grape that makes champagne what it is, providing its fruit and its easy-drinking style,” said Gilles, as he poured a 2009 pinot meunier vin clair. Its back palate presence impressed me most. His 2009 pinot noir vin clair, by comparison, was very even from start to finish, with great finesse and acid profile. Chardonnay from Taissy near Reims, where he sources most of his chardonnay, showed great front palate acidity, while Chigny-les-Roses chardonnay had great complexity and concentration. Gilles’ talent as a blender showcases how seamlessly these components contribute to each of the final cuvées.

Only a few of these wines are currently imported into Australia but Gilles was kind to oblige my request to open bottles of each of his cuvées. I include my notes here so you can track these down in your travels. The cuvées not currently available in Australia are those without prices listed. Meanwhile, take this list to your local 1st Choice or Vintage Cellars store and tell them which ones you’d like to order next year. Let’s encourage them to ship more of these cracking champagnes! When I’m on the prowl for big-party bubbles, the value for money in Dumangin is impossible to go past. I popped a good few bottles to celebrate the baptism of my first-born!



Dumangin’s tiny tanks

## J. DUMANGIN FILS GRANDE RÉSERVE NV, \$40

No, the price is not a misprint. This may be the cheapest champagne in this book, but you'd never guess it from the taste or the recipe. It's based on the 2006 vintage but contains a whopping sixty percent of reserve wines. This places it among the older non-vintage wines on the shelves, but don't for one moment equate 'old' with 'stale' because Gilles disgorges every shipment just prior to dispatch. The contradictions compound further when you consider that this is a blend of fifty percent pinot meunier, not a variety renowned for holding its freshness with age. The wine belies every concern with its beautiful finesse of fresh and preserved lemon fruit, layers of dried fruits and mixed spice, excellent length, fine structure and lingering minerality. We emptied cases of it at Matthew Juke's wedding in the English countryside this year, a disgorgement especially for the event with a dosage a couple of grams lower than the usual 10g/L.

92 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS BRUT 17 NV, \$55

When you're on the hunt for bargain champagne, Brut 17 is the perfect alternative to the more honed Gimonnet style. The idea here is a fresh, fruity take on NV champagne. With roughly one-third of each of the champagne grapes, the dominance of the pinots produces a rich style, toned by the freshness of younger vintages (2007 base, although there is still some 2006 base on Australian shelves). It's a wine of great power and balance, with excellent bead and plush notes of wild honey, ginger, roast nuts and toast countering a zesty citrus drive. I've seen some mushroomy and musty notes in a couple of random bottles this year, which I would normally simply write off to cork taint. These bottles are sealed with DIAM corks and I've never seen these characters from DIAM, so I'm still looking into what might be going on here. As always, request a replacement of any bottle not up to scratch, regardless of closure. \$38.50 by the dozen at Vintage Cellars.

92 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS VINTAGE 2002, \$80

Since 1988, Dumangin's vintage wines have always been from the same vineyards and the same blend of fifty-four percent pinot noir and forty-six percent chardonnay. The latest release, from the standout 2002 season, represents sensational value for money in vintage champagne. It's a wine of great freshness, restraint and determination. Layers of complexity of toast, nuts, honey and preserved lemon fill the bouquet while the palate sings with youthful lemon, grapefruit and white peach flavours. Fine minerality lingers long. \$56 by the dozen at Vintage Cellars.

94 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS VINTAGE 2003, \$80

The 2003 vintage will be released in early 2011. Gilles admitted that he's "not such a fan of the 2003" and commented that it was the first August harvest that his ninety-year-old grandfather had seen. It's a honeyed, caramel-accented style but carries commendable minerality and structure, considering the challenges of the vintage.

91 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS VINTAGE 2004, \$80

Keep an eye out for this wine in The Champagne Guide 2012. It's still years off release and very closed up at the moment. A very fine Dumangin vintage, it's tight, linear, clean and crisp.

94 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS EXTRA BRUT NV

Gilles' love for cooking and frequent travels through Asia inspired an extra brut style with just 2g/L of sugar. Based on the 2005 vintage, this is a very fine, zesty and clean style with a super-fine bead and a refreshing lemon juice finish. It has the potential to age well.

92 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS PREMIUM BLANC DE BLANCS 2005

This is quite a different take on the champagne style, produced from single vineyard chardonnay which is purposely late harvested, to the point where it's at risk of rotting on the vine. "We wait until the last possible moment to harvest it, and if it doesn't rot, we go ahead with harvest and process it unchaptilised" (no added sugar prior to fermentation). It's a tightly-defined, lemon fruited style with lingering fruit concentration and fine minerality. The aromatics are a touch dull, which is perhaps to be expected from this style.

91 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN FILS PREMIUM ROSÉ NV

This rosé is completely out of the bag, made using a saignée method on pinot meunier (fifty percent), unripe pinot noir (twenty-five percent) and chardonnay (twenty-five percent). The result is a particularly fresh and fruit focused style with a medium pink hue and quite zesty acidity. Tart wild strawberry hull and pink pepper notes accent a beautifully textured and persistent palate. Delicious rosé!

93 POINTS



## J. DUMANGIN SINGLE VINEYARD TRILOGY

Dumangin's experimental single vineyard, single variety, oak-aged trio will be released as a tiny offer of just 1000 three packs. The Achille Pinot Meunier NV (91 POINTS) is a 2000 vintage wine, although not labelled as such. Sourced from a Chigny-les-roses vineyard, it's packed with red fruits, vanilla, toast, honey and marshmallow. A fruity, rich, long, creamy style, it has good front palate presence but is a little hollow on the end. The Hippolyte Pinot Noir 2000 (90 POINTS) is toasty and finely structured, presenting attractive oak balance and rounded fruit concentration with layers of red fruits, truffles and marshmallows. The Firmin Chardonnay 2000 (92 POINTS) is the most complete of the trilogy, thanks to its finely structured acidity, toasty, spicy complexity and persistent length.



Web: [www.champagne-dumangin.com](http://www.champagne-dumangin.com)

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