

Jacques Selosse

Champagne's Revolutionary

Every decade or so, a winemaker comes along who, through the force of his ideas, and the brilliance of his work, has the power to change the course of wine history. Anselme Selosse is such an individual—and the man most responsible for the revolution that's changing Champagne for the better.

Since taking over Champagne Jacques Selosse in 1980, Anselme has used the uncompromising brilliance of his wines—as well as no small amount of charisma—to challenge Champagne's old definitions for excellence. If ten or twenty years from now, small, quality-driven growers have finally taken their share of the power—and the big houses have fully embraced the ideas of low yields, chemical-free vineyards and *terroir*-based wines—Anselme will deserve much of the credit.

A New Perspective

Anselme came of age in the 1970s, a time when the Champagne industry was famously, and pervasively, indifferent to fruit quality. A few big producers called the shots, and small growers wielded little power. Nowhere else in France were “brands” so dominant, with fruit bought and sold as a commodity, and with the town of origin as the sole determinant of price. In this system, growers had no incentive for lower yields, or labor-intensive organic viticulture, and vineyard work generally was abysmal.

It took a different perspective to understand what was wrong, and Anselme was the man to provide it. He had studied oenology not in Champagne, but in Burgundy, where he was introduced to such greats as Coche-Dury, Lafon and Leflaive. There he also learned the kind of commitment needed to produce profound, individualistic wines from great *terroirs*.

In 1974, Anselme completed his studies and began to develop his ideas at his father's estate, centered in Avize on the Côte de Blancs. Six



Anselme Selosse

years later the domaine became his, and he threw himself into radical change: dramatically reducing yields and farming organically. Working with his wife Corinne, he adopted ideas that were starting to become accepted in other parts of France but were still considered heretical by Champagne's establishment.

Basic Principles

Perhaps Anselme's most important insight was that to make profound Champagne, you must start with a great wine for the base. Fortunately for him, he was blessed with spectacular *grand cru* vineyard holdings in Avize, Cramant, and Oger.

In fact, while much has been made of his wine-making methods, Anselme's emphasis on viticulture and *terroir* may have been his greatest advance. He is one of the world's most profound thinkers about the relationship between healthy soils and the wines that spring from them. With low yields and fastidious viticulture, he is able to harvest fruit that is not only Champagne's most physiologically ripe, but also its most expressive.

In the winery, Selosse defies convention by using only indigenous yeasts for fermentations and by minimizing the use of SO₂. He ferments and raises his wines in wood barrels (less than 20% new) and leaves them on their fine lees for extended periods. ►

“It is hard to think of a single individual in Champagne today whose work ... is more influential than that of Anselme Selosse ... if the future of Champagne truly is going to be one in which terroir plays more of a role than the region as a whole will have to pay more attention to Selosse and less to its accountants and brand managers.”

Andrew Jeffords, The New France

“I’ve mentioned the name of Anselme Selosse on several occasions ... partly because he’s my favorite grower and partly because he’s the most original winemaker in all of Champagne ... Selosse’s wines have given Champagne a new dimension, with their unique, vinous, Chardonnay style ... Despite this fame, his wines cost nothing compared to Pétrus, Romanée-Conti, or Krug Clos du Mesnil.” *Richard Jublin, 4000 Champagnes*

To the Stars

Such techniques may explain why his wines have such towering quality, but they cannot explain why no one else has been able to duplicate the elusive “Selosse” flavor profile or the remarkable texture his wines exhibit. This is surely a tribute to the man, as well as to his viticulture.

Anselme’s questing intelligence has been testing Champagne’s limits for more than 25 years. This profound body of knowledge must account for some of the Selosse magic.

For example, his innovative use of *barriques* has allowed Anselme tremendous control over the role that oxygen plays in his base wines. He has also been at the forefront of the low-dosage movement, believing that his wines, with their purity of flavor, need no make-up. Over time, such experimentation has led to several fully-realized masterpieces, culminating in his prodigious vintage wines and the transcendent *solera*, Substance.

It is a measure of what Anselme has accomplished that in 1994, *Gault-Millau* named him France’s best winemaker in *every* category, an unprecedented honor. Accolades like this have contributed to his reputation as perhaps the most original winemaker in France today, admired not only by his peers but by a legion of collectors worldwide who covet each and every bottle of Jacques Selosse Champagne they can find. ■

THE WINES

Blanc de Blancs

Initial—Anselme’s “classic” Brut. An assemblage of three vintages. Aged 2 years before degorgement.

Version Originale—Anselme’s great multi-vintage cuvée is aged 42 months before degorgement, and bottled with little or no dosage.

Millésime—The *Methodes Selosse* used to express the character of a single year.

Les Carelles—Debuting in 2010, Les Carelles will adopt the Substance methods to a single vineyard in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger.

Substance—Avize’s essence in a single wine, without regard to vintage variation. Made from a *solera* started in 1987. Profound.

Exquise—A higher dosage makes this Sec the “cuvée Gourmand.”

Blanc de Noirs & Assemblage

La Côte Faron (ex-Contraste)—Derived from a single vineyard, and single variety (Pinot Noir), it is designed to capture the essence of Aÿ.

Rosé—With just a hint of salmon color, this rosé almost transcends class; a unique wine.

Note: Many commentators have called Selosse’s wines “Burgundy with bubbles,” and, like Burgundy, the wines benefit from extended cellar-aging and/or aeration before serving, and they should not be served too cold.

JACQUES SELOSSE

Champagne, France

OVERVIEW

Established: 1950-1960

First Vintage Bottled: 1960

Proprietors: Corinne & Anselme Selosse

Since assuming control of his father's estate in 1974, Anselme and Corinne Selosse have redefined Champagne with their fastidious viticulture, innovative *élevage*, and intensely vinous champagnes.

VINEYARD INFORMATION

Soils: classic chalky marls.

Vines: Approximately 0.85 hA of Pinot Noir, and 6.65 hA of Chardonnay in the elite villages of Avize, Cramant, Oger, Le Mesnil, Aÿ Ambonnay, and Mareuil-sur-Aÿ.

Appellation: Champagne

Harvest: by hand

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Selosse features some of the lowest yielding vines in the region – leading to the region's ripest, most expressive fruit.

They encourage the natural growth and evolution of the soil so that it may express minerality in the wine.

Primary fermentations occur in a mix of *pieces* (228L), *fût* (400L), and *demi-muids* (600L).

Malolactic fermentations are free to occur (or not) as each individual lot evolves.

Wines are held for one year in barrel, with a 16% new barrels added to the rotation each year. Reserve wines spend a year in *foudre* before moving to INOX.

The winemaking notes that follow are only guides. Because the Selosses' raw materials vary according to vintage conditions, they adapt their techniques each time they craft a cuvée. Their goal is always to maximize each wine's expression of identity and terroir.

Blanc de Blancs

Champagne Brut "Initial"

Three successive vintages from Avize, Oger & Cramant, primarily from lower-slope sites

Bottle Aging: >3 years before disgorgement.

Dosage: ~5g/l Avg. Production: 2,700 cases

Champagne Extra Brut "Version Originale"

Three successive vintages from Avize, Oger & Cramant, primarily from hillside sites

Bottle Aging: 5 years before disgorgement.

Dosage: ~1.5g/l Avg. Production: 300 cases

Champagne Demi-Sec "Exquise"

Sourced from a south-facing amphitheatre in Oger.

Bottle Aging: 3 years before disgorgement.

Dosage: ~24g/l Avg. Production: ~100 cases

Champagne "Les Carelles"

A solera wine, like Substance, from a single Chardonnay vineyard in Les-Mesnil-s/Oger.

Bottle Aging: The wine ages a further 5-6 years in bottle before disgorgement.

Dosage: 0-4g/l Avg. Production: ~140 cases

Champagne Brut "Millésimé"

A single vintage from two parcels in Avize.

Bottle Aging: ~9 years before disgorgement.

Dosage: 0 - 4g/l Avg. Production: 0 - 500 cases

Champagne "Substance"

Each year, 22% is withdrawn from a *solera* (started 1986) from 2 Avize parcels; a south-facing slope and an east hill-base.

Bottle Aging: The wine ages a further 5-6 years in bottle before disgorgement.

Dosage: 0-4g/l Avg. Production: 275 cases

Blanc de Noirs & Assemblages

Champagne Brut Rosé

Two successive vintages of Avize Chardonnay blended with ~10% Ambonnay Pinot Noir.

Bottle Aging: 5 years before disgorgement.

Dosage : 4-6g/l Avg. Production: ~500 cases

Champagne Extra Brut "La Côte Faron"

A Blanc de Noirs solera wine from a single Pinot Noir vineyard in Aÿ.

Bottle Aging: 5 years before disgorgement.

Dosage: 0-4g/l Avg. Production: ~140 cases