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GH MUMM

The GH Mumm brand has recovered much of its self-esteem damaged through several years of neglect under the ownership of Seagram and not greatly helped by its short period with Allied-Domecq either. But more than a decade of stability and investment with Pernod Ricard has considerably brightened the picture.

As a statement of intent, making the decision to bid for the F1 sponsorship – replacing Moët on the Grand Prix podium each race – was significant. One of the good things Seagram did for Mumm late in its reign was appoint Dominique Demarville as chef de cave in 1998.

Demarville set about improving the flagship Cordon Rouge blend, launched Mumm Grand Cru in 2005 and blended the first 1998 vintage of prestige line Cuvée 'R' Lalou, though by the time that was launched in 2007 he had departed to Veuve Clicquot and his deputy, Didier Mariotti, took up the reins. Mariotti has overseen the launch of the high class Mumm de Verzenay, fine vintage releases and more recently prepared the Collection du Chef de Caves.



22 LARMANDIER-BERNIER

Arguably one of the finest grower producers in Champagne, Pierre Larmandier makes top class wines, mainly pure Blanc de Blancs styles, and despite great critical acclaim he's self-effacingly modest about his success and his wines remain affordable.

He and wife Sophie own vineyards mainly in Vertus where they have 2ha of Pinot Noir and 14ha of Chardonnay, but also in the grand crus of Avize (a little less than 4ha) Cramant and Oger. The vineyards are farmed biodynamically and Larmandier uses oak barrels and large 500 and 600 litre oak foudres to ferment much of the base wine and store their reserves.

Winemaking and attention to detail is meticulous but Larmandier is always adjusting and refining his ideas trying always to improve the wines, which are stunning right across the range.

Two wines stand out. One is his Terre de Vertus non-dosé premier cru, which comes from two parcels of mid-slope vineyard in Vertus, the individual qualities of which Larmandier only discovered in blind tastings. Powerful, complex with

many nuances or aroma and flavour it's a great expression of terroir incredibly rich for a wine without dosage. The second, the vintaged Vieilles Vignes de Cramant Grand Cru comes from a south east facing plot where the vines are between 48 and 75 years old. Less obvious initially, this develops into a wine of great intensity and luxuriant creamy texture which needs time to develop in the bottle and in the glass.

23 PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS

The blanc de blancs champagnes made by brothers Didier and Olivier Gimonnet at Pierre Gimonnet in Cuis, are exemplary Côte des Blancs Chardonnays – taut, intense, mineral-edged wines of great finesse and elegance.

They make good use of the 26ha of vineyards the family owns – half

in the nearby grand cru villages of Cramant and Chouilly, the rest in the highly regarded premier cru of Cuis itself. All the wines undergo malolactic fermentation, because the Gimonnets feel the cru of Cuis in particular needs a little softening.

The non-vintage and straight vintage wines account for about 80% of their production. The currently available brut non-vintage (Cuis 1er Cru Brut NV) is mainly from the 2008 harvest (72%) plus reserve wine from '07, '06, '05 and '04. Reserve wine plays an important part in the blend – unusually, the Gimonnet family prefers to hold all its reserve stock in bottle rather than tank. "Despite the expense we think this preserves the wine better than keeping it in vats," says Didier Gimonnet. The age of their vineyards – half are more than 40 years old and two were respectively planted in 1911 and 1913 – keeps yields down and quality up.



24 AYALA

This previously little known house was purchased by the Bollinger group in 2005 and Ghislain de Montgolfier decided that Hervé Augustin, who had been managing Bollinger, should take over as MD.

Augustin set about raising Ayala's profile and drawing attention to its well-made wines. He did this in number of ways, relishing the freedom to experiment that had been impossible at Bollinger.

One of his first initiatives was to lower dosage levels in line with the modern trend among small, go-ahead producers and he went a step further by introducing completely non-dosé versions of three of the regular cuvées.

Augustin also started to give the date of disgorgement on the back labels – another trend which is still gathering support in the appellation today and may become enshrined in the AOC regulations soon – thus aiding those who might want to cellar the wines for a couple of years.

Augustin brought the house back into profitability and greatly raised its profile in his time there. The wines deserved a higher profile and they continue to offer good value across the range today.

