



## GEOFFROY

(Zhof-wah)

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# CHAMPAGNE GEOFFROY

*'I am a winegrower,' says young, fifth-generation vigneron Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy. 'I need to be in the vineyard, this is my passion.' There is a well-considered sensibility about Geoffroy, and every detail of his work in the vineyard and winery follows a stringent regime, while maintaining practical common sense. With 11 glorious hectares in Cumières, and one in each of the nearby villages of Damery, Hautvillers and two in Fleury-la-Rivière, he is well placed to capture the fruit purity, poise and deep mineral fingerprint of some of the finer premier crus of the Vallée de la Marne. The sustaining presence of malic acidity makes his champagnes particularly long-lived.*

The finest grower in Cumières is no longer in Cumières. With winemaking facilities and cellars shared between his grandmother's house, his father's house and a neighbour, when the opportunity came to consolidate in 2008, Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy moved the whole operation 20 minutes (by tractor) down the road to a proud and spacious facility in Aÿ.

'Nothing has changed in the vineyards,' asserts Jean-Baptiste. 'I want to create a champagne of terroir, to achieve the best expression of the soil in the grapes.' To this end, his highest goal in the winery is to maintain freshness in every cuvée. This proved to be a challenge, working from three sites in Cumières, necessitating regular pumping and moving of bottles.

Now he can guarantee that his grapes are on the press less than an hour after they are harvested, in a facility ingeniously designed to do away with pumping altogether. Taking advantage of the hill behind, the harvest is delivered to the press on the third level of the building, and the juice flows by gravity to settling

tanks immediately below the press on the second level, then to fermentation on the first level, and finally to two levels of deep maturation cellars below. In 2012 he purchased a further 500 square metres of storage space in the village, not to increase production, but to relocate bottles to provide space to move his barrels deeper into the cellar, where the temperature is more stable.

Every step of production is geared towards maintaining freshness and vineyard character, which Geoffroy achieves with admirable consistency, even with low use of sulphur dioxide as a preservative. A traditional press is employed, which he admits is difficult to operate by hand, but worth every effort for quality. Each of 45 different parcels is pressed and vinified separately, and the tailles of each pressing separated and vinified independently.

Fermentation is conducted variously in the best vessels to facilitate controlled oxidation, generally small tanks for non-vintage wines, and small barrels and large foudres for vintage wines and the best pinot noir

parcels, and Geoffroy has recently shown a preference for 350-litre barrels. Previously using only older barrels, he has recently introduced a turnover of younger barrels, purchased from Colin-Morey in Chassagne-Montrachet, though oak flavours and tannins can at times conflict with the elegance of his fruit.

Ferments rely on wild yeast, but are inoculated if they don't start naturally. To further preserve freshness, malolactic fermentation is avoided (but will occasionally start spontaneously). Only concentrated grape juice is used for dosage, because he says he couldn't find a good balance using sugar. 'This emphasises the taste of the grapes and the character of the soil,' he says.

Geoffroy generally uses extra brut dosages of less than 5g/L. As he puts it, 'A champagne must always be very fine, elegant and fresh. If you have good ripeness and good practice in the winery you don't need dosage.'

Ripeness is achieved through painstaking attention to every detail in the vineyard. Geoffroy's annual production of 130,000 bottles is sourced exclusively from his own vines, apart from 5% permitted under récoltant-manipulant registration. Pinot rules in this part of the world, and his holdings comprise 40% pinot noir and 40% meunier and 20% chardonnay.

## EARTH-FRIENDLY APPROACH

His eco-friendly approach is close to organic, but falls purposely short of the constraints of certification. 'I like to say I am biological, without being biodynamic,' he says. To best express the soil in the grapes, vineyards are ploughed to discourage surface roots and drive the vines deeper into the subsoils. To the same end, several species of natural grasses are cultivated in the mid-rows to provide surface competition. He is currently introducing a horse to plough one vineyard in an attempt to reduce tractor compaction. Organic fertilisers encour-



*Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy pumps over a red wine ferment.*

age soil health, and herbicides are avoided. Sulphur and copper sulphate sprays are used where possible, but here he sometimes deviates from a strict organic regime, calling on other chemicals as required.

Geoffroy knows each of his 45 plots intimately, and treats each separately, regarding them variously as grand cru, premier cru or unclassified. The blanket classification of Cumières as premier cru makes no sense to him. 'On the poor soil and sand at the top of the hill near the forest, it is inferior to Damery, which is unclassified,' he clarifies. 'The early-ripening middle slope of the south-facing amphitheatre of Cumières north of the city is of grand cru quality, and to the west it is premier cru.' He points out each on a satellite photo, and his designations correspond precisely with green patches that betray the most vigorous vines. There is a natural regulation of vigour in Geoffroy's vines, with old vines and mid-row grasses limiting yields, ensuring earlier ripeness.

## COTEAUX CHAMPENOIS RED WINES

This approach allows him to produce one of the most celebrated Coteaux Champenois still red wines, a passion he inherited from his father and grandfather. 'I make a red wine from the best grapes of my terroir, from the oldest vines and the lowest yields,' he says.

After experimenting extensively with red wine production in Beaujolais and Burgundy, Geoffroy produces red wine only in warmer vintages from Cumières pinot noir (meunier for the first time in 2008), releasing it as both a non-vintage and a vintage cuvée. The wines undergo malolactic fermentation and mature in 600-litre demi-muids for at least 12 months. These are long-ageing wines, with the potential to live for decades, and are only released when he deems them ready. Production is small and sporadic. 'It's good to make Coteaux Champenois when you don't need to!' he says. 'You can't make it to demand or in every vintage.'

In 2012, Geoffroy simplified the name of the estate from 'René Geoffroy' to 'Geoffroy' and introduced a new label, depicting the gate of the house in Aÿ to represent his new identity. 'It is not my philosophy to put my first name on the label, as I hope to one day pass the estate on to my children. There is no point changing the name with every generation,' he says.

Vintages, varieties, dosage and date of disgorgement are now displayed on the back of every label, a laudable commitment for a small grower who disgorges every 2–3 months and tweaks the dosage for each disgorgement.

With undeviating attention to well-situated vineyards, an enviable production facility larger than his needs — and no intention to grow production — Cumières' finest grower is as fine as ever.



## GEOFFROY EXPRESSION BRUT PREMIER CRU NV \$\$

**93 points** • 2010 BASE VINTAGE WITH 2009 RESERVES • DISGORGED MAY 2014  
• TASTED IN AÏ

**50% meunier, 40% pinot noir, 10% chardonnay from Cumières and a little from Hautvillers; tank fermented; no malolactic fermentation; 5g/L dosage; 50% of production volume, ~65,000 bottles**

Even in the difficult 2010 season, this cuvée confidently meets its brief of easy drinking freshness. The rich fig and red apple fruits of Cumières meunier create a compelling contrast with crisp malic acidity and tight grapefruit and lemon zest notes. Three years on lees makes for generous maturity for an entry cuvée, reinforcing honey and fruit cake spice and a creamy texture.

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## GEOFFROY PURETÉ BRUT NATURE NV \$\$

**91 points** • 2009 BASE VINTAGE WITH 2008 RESERVES • DISGORGED JUNE 2014  
• TASTED IN AÏ

**50% meunier, 40% pinot noir, 10% chardonnay from Cumières and a little from Hautvillers; no dosage**

Pureté is Expression with another year on lees and no dosage. Full malic acidity and no added sugar makes for a tense and steely champagne with accentuated salt minerality. Clean, precise, taut, young and high-strung, this is an oyster-ready style driven by crunchy acidity and lemon zest that will appreciate some years to soften and relax. In the meantime, it's strictly for champagne diehards.



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## GEOFFROY EMPREINTE BRUT PREMIER CRU 2008 \$\$

**94 points** • DISGORGED JUNE 2014 • TASTED IN AÏ

**78% pinot noir, 16% meunier, 6% chardonnay; 76% fermented in tanks, 24% in large oak foudres; 6g/L dosage**

Geoffroy is refining his style with each vintage, and responded to the elegant 2008 season sensitively with less oak and less dosage. The result captures his aspiration to portray the best expression of Cumières pinot noir, with pretty red berry and red apple fruits becoming subtle butterscotch, gingernut biscuits, brioche and spice. A crunchy, focused finish celebrates the vivacity and tension of malic acidity. Minerality is soft but supportive, true to Cumières, finishing generous and lively, promising medium-term potential.

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## GEOFFROY BRUT PREMIER CRU VOLUPTÉ 2007 \$\$\$

**92 points** • DISGORGED DECEMBER 2013 • TASTED IN AÏ

**80% Cumières chardonnay, 10% pinot noir, 10% meunier; 45% vinified in barrels and vats; 2g/L dosage**

Low dosage and a full serve of malic acidity in a chardonnay-focused style make for a tense and steely champagne of impressive stature, which should be reserved for champagne aficionados. A high-strung lemon zest core is filled out with impressive complexity of fig, mixed spice and ginger cake, finishing long and dry, with firm minerality and prominent acidity. It's beautifully focused and just needs time to soften and calm down.



## GEOFFROY ROSÉ DE SAIGNÉE PREMIER CRU BRUT NV \$\$

**94 points** • 2009 BASE VINTAGE • DISGORGED JUNE 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

**100% pinot noir; 100% 2009, but released too young to be labelled as such; saignée of 100% skin-contact pinot noir; 10g/L dosage**

Renowned for his long-lived Cumières rouge Coteaux Champenois, it's no surprise that Geoffroy's Rosé de Saignée also improves with time post-disgorgement, and even two years after release it's showing compelling primary freshness of pomegranate, red cherry, pink pepper and mixed spice. The hue is still a full, vibrant pomegranate, the bead very fine, structure softly mineral and the finish persistent.

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## GEOFFROY BLANC DE ROSÉ EXTRA BRUT NV \$\$\$\$

**89 points** • 100% 2011 • DISGORGED SEPTEMBER 2013 • 3G/L DOSAGE  
• TASTED IN Aÿ

**95 points** • 100% 2009 • DISGORGED DECEMBER 2011 • 1G/L DOSAGE • TASTED IN Aÿ  
**50% pinot noir, 50% chardonnay macerated in a saignée method**

When Geoffroy first conceived this cuvée it was intended to be released as a vintage, but he was captured by its floral fruitiness after 16 months in the cellar, and hence released it as a non-vintage, which was a mistake. I have never understood it in this guise, with its high-strung malic tension, simple fruit profile, short, dry finish and angular mouthfeel. To its credit, the 2011 is clean in its subtle expression of redcurrants, watermelon and pepper and its vibrant crimson pink hue. No surprise that this cuvée blossoms with time, and Geoffroy has held back 800 bottles to release as a vintage wine. The secret to the NV cuvée is to leave it in your cellar for at least five years, which may seem counterintuitive for a rosé disgorged young, but such is the sustaining power of malic acidity that it will blossom gloriously. The 2009 vintage is proof, and three years after disgorgement it sings with vivacious poise and elegant purity of red cherry and strawberry fruit, riding a glorious wave of malic acidity.



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## GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 2005 \$\$\$\$

**91 points** • DISGORGED SEPTEMBER 2014 • TASTED IN Aÿ

**Geoffroy's vintage wine is a blend of the best barrels, hence a dramatically different blend every year – here 53% chardonnay, 30% pinot noir and 17% meunier; totally vinified in barrels; no chaptalisation, no added yeast, no malolactic fermentation, no fining or filtering; aged under cork; 4g/L dosage; 6095 bottles**

This is a cuvée that appreciates a large glass to open up. Full oak fermentation dominates, contributing savoury and spicy characters of curry, turmeric and Tabasco, rounding crunchy malic acidity and soothing the firm phenolic grip inherent in the 2005 harvest. It finishes long and silky.



## GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 2004 \$\$\$\$

**90 points** • DISGORGED MAY 2014 • TASTED IN Aÿ

71% chardonnay, 29% pinot noir; 2g/L dosage; 6096 bottles; otherwise as per 2005 vintage notes

The dominance of new oak in this vintage has always bothered me, with toasty, smoky barrel characters and firm structure quashing ripe fruit notes reminiscent of fruit cake. An additional two years on lees since its release has helped it to integrate, but it cries out for at least another few years for acidity to soften and oak to integrate. It remains to be seen whether it will ever emerge from the forest.

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## GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 2002 \$\$\$\$

**95 points** • DISGORGED JANUARY 2014 • TASTED IN Aÿ

60% pinot noir, 35% chardonnay, 5% meunier; 4g/L dosage; 3810 bottles; otherwise as per 2005 vintage notes

A grand vintage for Geoffroy, basking in the glory of another few years on lees since I last tasted it, arriving in a happy place for re-release in 2015, with the malic drive to live more than a decade yet. This is a champagne of expansive presence and focused elegance, tapping deep into chalk minerality, while sustaining wonderfully youthful lemon and white peach fruit, evolving to great complexity of mocha, exotic spice, fig and vanilla.

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## GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 2000 \$\$\$\$

**92 points** • DISGORGED JANUARY 2014 • TASTED IN Aÿ

70% chardonnay, 30% pinot noir; 4g/L dosage; 5565 bottles; otherwise as per 2005 vintage notes

Projecting the yellow-fruited richness of the season, this is a cuvée that basks in the glory of locusts, figs, golden delicious apples, pears and lemon zest, filled out with the mixed spice of bottle age and the biscuity complexity of barrel fermentation, controlled by strict malic acidity and nicely balanced phenolic mouthfeel. Even this generous vintage needs more time still for its malic acid to soften. This bottle was slightly let down by a faint dustiness, probably tainted by one of its two corks.



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## GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 1999 \$\$\$\$

**94 points** • DISGORGED JANUARY 2014 • TASTED IN Aÿ

50% pinot noir, 50% chardonnay; 4g/L dosage; 4000 bottles; otherwise as per 2005 vintage notes

Grand testimony to the magical, sustaining endurance of malic acidity and the age worthiness of Geoffroy's champagnes, even the warm 1999 season screams for more time for its tense malic acidity to soften. There's an enticingly fresh raspberry fruit personality to this vintage, backed by intense fruit mince spice, plum pudding and honey, finishing with drive and persistence.