



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE CHAMPAGNE REGION

THE  
**CHAMPAGNE**  
GUIDE

*2014–2015*

*Praise for the 2011 edition*


'EXCELLENT ... THOROUGHLY RECOMMENDED.' – JANCIS ROBINSON

TYSON STELZER



Jean-Baptiste,  
In gratitude for your  
warm hospitality and in  
celebration of the purity,  
poise and deep mineral  
fingerprint of Cumières.  
Santé!

Tyler Hoyer





# GEOFFROY

(Zhof-wah)

7/10

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## CHAMPAGNE GEOFFROY

*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, young fifth-generation vigneron Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy moved the whole operation 20 minutes (by tractor) down the road to Aÿ. Importantly, the vineyards remained, all 11 glorious hectares in Cumières, and one in each of the nearby villages of Damery, Hautvillers and Fleury-la-Rivière. This is what matters most for Geoffroy. 'I am a winegrower,' he says. '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. He is now better placed than ever to capture the fruit purity, poise and deep mineral fingerprint of some of the finer premier crus of the Vallée de la Marne.*

WHEN I FIRST MET JEAN-BAPTISTE IN HIS PROUD AND spacious facility in Aÿ, my schedule didn't permit opportunity to visit his vineyards, so he took me to the rooftop, which enjoys a direct view of the slopes of Cumières.

'Nothing has changed in the vineyards,' he assured me. '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. Previously using only older barrels, Geoffroy has recently introduced a turnover of younger barrels, though the oak flavours and tannins that this has introduced in at least one of his *cuvées* do not flatter 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, though a couple of *cuvées* are currently at double this level, and probably don't need to be. 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. Pinots rule in this part of the world, and his holdings comprise 40% each of pinot noir and pinot 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 bio-logical, without being bio-dynamic,' 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, a number of species of natural grasses are cultivated in the mid-rows to provide competition at the surface. He is currently introducing a horse to plough one vineyard in an attempt to reduce tractor compaction. Organic fertilisers encourage 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 photograph, and his designations corresponded precisely with the 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 his red wine only in warmer vintages from Cumières pinot noir (pinot meunier for the first time in 2008), and releases it as both a non-vintage and a vintage *cuvée*. The wines undergo malolactic fermentation and mature in 600-litre *demi-muids* for a minimum of 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 • SS

*98 points* • DISGORGED OCTOBER 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

2009 base vintage and 2008 reserve; 50% pinot meunier, 40% pinot noir, 10% chardonnay; 6g/L dosage

The 2008 was the first vintage that Jean-Baptiste made himself, and this is the finest I've seen his entry cuvée. It's a beautifully balanced, clean style of crystal-clear fruit expression of zesty citrus freshness and the pinot meunier lead of gentle red cherry and strawberry character. A lively aperitif style, with fine acidity and soft, chalky minerality building a long, fresh, crisp finish.

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## GEOFFROY PURETE BRUT ZERO NV • SS

*92 points* • DISGORGED JANUARY 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

2007 base vintage and 2006 reserve; same base as Expression; 2 years older; 50% pinot meunier, 40% pinot noir, 10% chardonnay; zero dosage

The same base that I tasted with Jean-Baptiste two years ago is still current, and from a younger disgorgement it holds its poise confidently. Its fine citrus fruits have evolved to a fleshier demeanour of succulent white peach, red plums, nutmeg and five-spice, becoming subtly toasty with brioche suggestions, accurately proclaiming its pinot meunier lead. This works well in this zero-dosage style, giving a stronger voice to chalky minerality, and finishing with pronounced, firm acidity.



## GEOFFROY EMPREINTE BRUT PREMIER CRU 2007 • SS

*94 points* • DISGORGED NOVEMBER 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

76% pinot noir, 10% pinot meunier, 14% chardonnay; fully fermented in oak barrels; 10g/L dosage

Cumières' pinot noir is beautifully portrayed here, structured with the tension of a higher-acid season. Its personality is captured in gorgeous rose petals, succulent strawberries, ripe raspberries and mixed spice, with subtle notes of brioche beginning to rise. A vintage of line, length and precision, with soft, mineral texture. High dosage is well matched to the vibrancy of its acidity, and Geoffroy plans to decrease dosage with successive disgorgements.



### GEOFFROY ROSÉ DE SAIGNÉE BRUT NV • SS

*90 points* • DISGORGED SEPTEMBER 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

100% 2010, but released too young to be labelled as such; saignée of 100% skin-contact pinot noir; 10g/L dosage

Geoffroy's saignée has produced a full crimson hue in 2010. A very pretty bouquet sings with the primary vibrancy of violet perfume, red apple, pomegranate, red cherries and strawberries. The palate has a raspberry generosity and an assortment of rich red berry fruits of all kinds, finishing with candied dosage notes and soft minerality. Without sufficient time to build persistence or complexity, its up-front fruit freshness doesn't carry through to the finish.

### GEOFFROY BRUT PREMIER CRU VOLUPTÉ 2006 • SSS

*91 points* • DISGORGED SEPTEMBER 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

80% chardonnay, 20% pinot noir; 94% fermented in large- and small-format oak; aged 5 years on lees; 5g/L dosage

I first tasted a younger version of this vintage with Jean-Baptiste two years ago, and after three years on lees and just 2g/L dosage it was a magnificent lemon-zest-accented expression of Cumières chardonnay. It has softened and rounded considerably with a further two years on lees, and I'm not sure that a higher dosage is necessary. Creamy, concentrated and fleshy, its theme is now juicy yellow summer fruits with baked apple, wild honey, ginger, almond and mixed spice. Its smooth silkiness is classic mature Cumières.



### GEOFFROY BLANC DE ROSÉ EXTRA BRUT NV • SSSS

*91 points* • DISGORGED JUNE 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

100% 2010, though too young to be labelled as such; 50% chardonnay and 50% pinot noir macerated in a saignée method; 2g/L dosage; 4000 bottles

This is purposely a very different rosé, a fresh citrus fruits and mineral-accented style, designed as an aperitif or partner for Japanese cuisine. A full crimson pink hue announces a very young, primary and fresh thing of perky pink pepper, rhubarb, nashi pear, pomegranate and pink grapefruit. It's all up-front and fruity, with a short finish underlined by crisp acidity and a creamy bead. For such simplicity, its considerable price has always puzzled me, perhaps reflecting scarcity more than style. It will benefit from time to build persistence and complexity, and Jean-Baptiste has doubled production this year, with the intention of holding 1000 bottles back as a late-disgorged release.



### GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 2004 • SSSS

*87 points* • DISGORGED OCTOBER 2012 • TASTED IN Aÿ

Geoffroy's vintage wine is a blend of the best barrels, hence a different blend every year — here 71% chardonnay and 29% pinot noir; totally vinified in barrels; no chaptalisation, no added yeast, no malolactic fermentation, no fining or filtering; aged 7 years on lees; 2g/L dosage

Sadly dominated by coarse oak, imposing its wood spice flavours and firm wood tannins, which trod on otherwise pristine and honed grapefruit and lemon fruit character. This is not a concern I've had with any other vintage of this cuvée. Don't drink it from a small flute, too cold, or too soon. It demands a very long time to come into balance, and has the acid drive and fruit energy that perhaps one day it will?

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### GEOFFROY EXTRA BRUT MILLÉSIME 2002 • SSSS

*95 points* • DISGORGED SEPTEMBER 2011 • TASTED IN ADELAIDE

A grand vintage for Geoffroy, tapping deep into chalk minerality and great fruit expression of lemon zest, yellow summer fruits and dried pear, evolving to wonderful complexity of nougat, almond and vanilla. Its mineral mouthfeel is exceptional, and it lingers with consummate precision and great persistence. The first bottle opened lacked freshness, drying out and becoming bitter on the finish, presumably oxidised.

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### RENÉ GEOFFROY CUVÉE AUTREFOIS 1996

*97 points* • TASTED IN Aÿ

Geoffroy's first vintage; full barrel fermentation and no malolactic fermentation, in the same philosophy as Volupté and Empreinte today

The magical ability of malic acidity to sustain Geoffroy's cuvées for a long and magnificent future is exemplified in his first vintage. This glorious high-acid and high-ripeness season has evolved to a beautifully silky and fine demeanour of impeccable integration, with malic acidity providing delightful focus to softly mineral texture. Layers of complexity of glacé fig, dried apple, preserved lemon and bees wax make for quite an enchanting experience now, or any time in the coming decade.



### GEOFFROY COTEAUX CHAMPENOIS CUMIÈRES ROUGE MILLÉSIME 2008 • SS

*98 points* • TASTED IN Aÿ

Geoffroy makes one of the great red wines of Champagne, with excellent medium-red hue using 100% pinot meunier for the first time, communicating all the personality of this grape in violet perfume, pure red cherries, cherry kernel and even touches of white pepper. The lively acidity of 2008 infuses a bright vibrancy, propelling silky minerality and beautifully managed, super-fine tannins. It will age exceedingly long.