

## This Christmas, Peter Bourne suggests trying the purest bubbly of all.

**There are three characteristics** that separate good wine from great. They are the three Ps: purity of purpose, purity of flavour and purity of personality. And there is one sparkling wine that has purity in bucketloads: Pur Chardonnay, which is made entirely of chardonnay grapes.

Champagnes that are made of 100 per cent chardonnay are called blanc de blancs; literally, "white of whites". The grapes for blanc de blancs are typically sourced from the Côte des Blancs, the sub-region of Champagne famed for its white grapes from (among others) the villages of Avize, Chouilly, Cramant, Oger and, the most famous, Le Mesnil.

Most Australian premium sparkling wines (it's such a daggy, non-evocative term yet we can no longer use Champagne on domestic labels) are made from a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay. The Champenoise also use pinot meunier (a cousin to pinot noir) in their blends. These dark-skinned (but clear-fleshed grapes) are hand picked with the whole bunches quickly pressed, allowing the juice to drain freely, untainted by the red skins. This carefully orchestrated process allows "white" sparkling wines and Champagnes to be made from red grapes. And so, blanc de noirs are sparkling wines made wholly from red or black (noir) grapes.

The Champenoise often espouse a well-worn mantra: it's the red fruit that gives the structural backbone, weight and flesh to the wine, while the chardonnay component gives the wine style, zest and vitality. Of the latter there is no question but after tasting numerous blanc de blancs at five, 10, 15 or 20 years, the premise just doesn't hold water – or wine, for that matter. Blanc de blancs are complete with their own unique substance and style.

Young blanc de blancs are tight, bright and effervescent with lots of spanking fresh apple and citrusy fruit flavours and a ping of juicy, lemon-fresh acidity. These youthful blanc de blancs team well with oysters or fly solo as the perfect aperitif. When aged on their yeast lees, blanc de blancs develop delicious biscuity, dry toast and honey-like characters while still remaining incredibly fresh and bright. Pair them with sashimi or a scallop carpaccio. Post-disgorgement blanc de blancs age beautifully, their "time on cork" revealing even more honey-like characters with hints of lime marmalade and buttered toast emerging. These bottle maturation characters parallel those of a classic Chablis – no surprise, as chardonnay is the mandatory grape of Chablis and the region shares the same chalky limestone-based soils as the vineyards of Champagne.

And in Australia? The same deal applies – we look to our coolest viticultural sites for the best chardonnay fruit to make our blanc de blancs styles. The Adelaide Hills, Tasmania, Tumbarumba and the Yarra Valley are prime sources. A swathe of credible blanc de blancs are made in the Yarra – with sparkling stalwart Domaine Chandon joined by Gembrook Hill and Yarra Burn – while in Tasmania, Delamere, Iron Pot Bay and Kregliner all run in the blanc de blancs stakes. Tasmania's pinnacle producer, the House of Arras, is set to release its first blanc de blancs in 2012. Arras's sparkling supremo, Ed Carr, certainly takes a long-term view – patience is an essential character trait for a sparkling winemaker.

So, whether you like your bubbles young and fresh or rich, toasty and complex, pure chardonnay is the way to go – be it indigenous or the real thing from Champagne. Saluté.



# wine blancdeblancs

Photography **Jennifer Soo**



**2005 Chandon ZD Blanc de Blancs (Yarra Valley, Vic), \$44**

A sexy wine in sexy packaging. Its slinky label is complete with a crown seal, as sparkling wines are prone to cork taint. ZD is "zero dosage", denoting a bone-dry style with no additional liquoring. And its taste is exactly that, with lemon pith freshness and crisp, juicy acidity.



**2005 Clover Hill Blanc de Blancs (Tasmania), \$55**

Clover Hill is Taltarni's sparkling wine vineyard in the Pipers River and the '05 is only the second blanc de blancs they've released. It smells of freshly cut lemons with hints of cool, wet river pebbles and candy floss. Austerity is a one-word description of the palate, which is refreshingly dry with a lemon zest finish.



**Delamotte Blanc de Blancs (Le Mesnil, France), \$125**

Delamotte is part of the revered House of Salon, which is only made in the very best years, with Delamotte accessing Salon's unused grapes. It's a bright, fresh, vital wine with aromatics of white nectarine, citrus blossom and lemon sorbet. The fine mousse explodes in the mouth with lots of citrusy flavours.



**1999 Pol Roger Brut Blanc de Chardonnay (Epernay, France), \$146**

Pol's White Foil non-vintage is a soft, creamy-styled Champagne, while its blanc de blancs is exactly the reverse. It's tightly coiled and intensely flavoured and, after a decade, still elegant and graceful with lots of candied peel and toasted panettone aromas and a rich, intense, fulfilling palate.



**1998 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs (Reims, France), \$375**

Comtes de Champagne is acknowledged as one of the greatest Champagnes. The 1998 has an intense bouquet of honeysuckle, white flowers and warm brioche. The palate is deep with evocative hints of candied cumquats and wild honey. A scintillating minerality drives the finish.