

Jacques Selosse

Champagne's Revolutionary

Every decade or so, a wine-maker 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.



Anselme Selosse

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 pro-

found, 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 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. ►

THE RARE WINE CO.

"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 Juhlin, 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 *Methode Selosse* used to express the character of a single year.

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

Contraste - This wine allowed Selosse to work with Pinot Noir from Aÿ. Incredibly vinous and powerful.

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 cellaring and/or aeration before serving, and they should not be served too cold.

JACQUES SELOSSE

Champagne, France

OVERVIEW

Established: 1950
First Vintage Bottled: 1974
Proprietors: Corinne & Anselme Selosse
Winemaker: Anselme Selosse

Since assuming control of his father's estate in 1980, Anselme Selosse has redefined Champagne with his fastidious viticulture, innovative winemaking, and intensely vinous champagnes.

VINEYARD INFORMATION

Soils: lime-rich soils farmed to maximize the harmony and health of the soils.
Vines: Approximately 1 hA of Pinot Noir, and 7 hA of Chardonnay in the elite villages of Avize, Cramant, Oger, Le Mesnil, Aÿ, Ambonnay, and Mareuil-su-Aÿ.
Appellation: Champagne
Harvest: by hand

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The vines are trained to produce some of the region's lowest yields, and the viticulture aims to create a healthy balance of micro-flora in the vineyards and soils. The result could be the region's ripest, most expressive fruit.
Primary fermentations occur in Burgundian *pieces* (228L barrels) purchased used from Domaine Leflaive.
Malolatic fermentations are free to occur (or not) as each individual lot evolves.
Wines are held for one year in a mix of pieces (228L), fut (400L), and demi-muids (600L), with a small percentage of new barrels added to the rotation each year. Reserve wines are moved to INOX after the first year.

The winemaking notes that follow are only guides. Because Anselme's raw materials vary according to vintage conditions, he adapts his techniques each time he crafts a cuvée. But his goal is always to maximize each wine's expression of identity and terroir.

Blanc de Blancs

Champagne Brut "Initial"

Cépage: Three successive vintages of Chardonnay from Avize, Cramant, & Oger.
Bottle Aging: >3 years before disgorgement.
Dosage: ~5g/l
Production: 2,700 cases

Champagne Extra Brut "Version Originale"

Cépage: Three successive vintages of Chardonnay from Avize, Cramant, & Oger.
Bottle Aging: 5 years before disgorgement.
Dosage: ~1.5g/l
Production: 300 cases

Champagne Demi-Sec "Exquise"

Cépage: Estate Chardonnay
Bottle Aging: 3 years before disgorgement.
Dosage: ~24g/l
Production: 85 cases

Champagne Brut "Millésime"

Cépage: Avize Chardonnay from a single year.
Bottle Aging: ~10 years before disgorgement.
Dosage: 0 - 4g/l
Production: 0 - 500 cases

Champagne "Substance"

Cépage: Withdrawn from a *solera* of Avize Chardonnay that was started in 1986.
Bottle Aging: In addition to the long aging in *solera*, the wine ages a further 7-8 years in bottle before disgorgement.
Dosage: 0-4g/l (depending on the wine)
Production: 250 cases

Blanc de Noirs & Assemblages

Champagne Brut Rosé

Cépage: Two successive vintages of Avize Chardonnay blended with a little Ambonnay Pinot Noir (purchased from Francis Egly).
Bottle Aging: 5 years before disgorgement.
Production: ~500 cases

Champagne Brut Blanc de Noirs "Contraste"

Cépage: Two successive vintages of Pinot Noir from Aÿ and Ambonnay.
Bottle Aging: 5 years before disgorgement.
Dosage: ~4g/l Production: ~200 cases