

Forbes

Blanc De Noirs - A Different Shade Of Champagne



Champagne has traditionally been made by blending white and red grapes to create a harmonious approach or what one might call a house style, so that consumers can recognize this character year in and year out for their favorite Champagne brands.

But often, producers will fashion a Champagne made from only one varietal to focus on a specific style; this option is often linked to where the estate is located within the Champagne region. The best known example of this is Blanc de Blancs Champagne, which can only be made with white grapes; thus most producers in the Côte des Blancs area where Chardonnay dominates local plantings produce a Blanc de Blancs. As Chardonnay is such a well-loved varietal, these cuvées have become loved by consumers and critics alike.

(Note that there are a select few examples of Blanc de Blancs Champagne produced that contain other white varietals, such as Blanc Vrai, Fromenteau and Petit Meslier; these are planted in the Côte des Bar in southern Champagne; Drappier is a producer here that makes a Blanc de Blancs with Chardonnay and three other white varietals.)

Lately, Blanc de Noirs has become an important category, especially for lovers of more full-bodied Champagnes (note: this is a generalization, as some examples of Blanc de Blancs are quite powerful). As the name suggests a Blanc de Noirs Champagne - “white from black,” can only be produced from red grapes. This means a 100% Pinot Noir Champagne or one made exclusively from Meunier, a distinctive red varietal that makes up almost one-third of the plantings in the entire region; or a Blanc de Noirs could be a blend of Pinot Noir and Meunier.

As with the Côte des Blancs where many producers source local Chardonnay that dominates plantings, producers in the Montagne de Reims district - planted to 40% Pinot Noir and 36% Meunier, and the Vallée de la Marne, west of Epernay and Reims where Meunier dominates the plantings - often make a Blanc de Noirs. Among the most famous producers in these areas known for Blanc de Noirs are Bollinger, Philipponnat, Egly-Ouriet and Billecart-Salmon. Other famous producers of Blanc de Noirs Champagne include Krug (with its highly limited Clos d’Ambonnay bottling); Cedric Bouchard (from the Côte des Bar) and Petit & Bajan, an artisan producer from Avize in the Côte des Blancs.

As Blanc de Noirs Champagnes contain only red grapes, these cuvées stand up to very rich foods, such as duck breast, spicy chicken Indian style, roast meat, foie gras or terrines.

Notes on current releases of Blanc de Noirs Champagne:

Bollinger PNTX 17 - 100% Pinot Noir, primarily from the village of Tauxières; 50% of the fruit is from 2017; disgorged in February 2022. Medium deep yellow; aromas of apricot, stewed apples, biscuit, toast and a note of honey. Medium-full, there is excellent ripeness, good acidity, wonderful complexity, very good persistence and impressive varietal character. Beautifully made, this is a refined Blanc de Noirs meant for foods such as duck breast, roast chicken or aged gruyere. Enjoy over the next 5-7 years.

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