

Champagne Tarlant

Visits

This visit to Champagne Tarlant took place in January, 2015.



Words by Jules Dressner, photos by Noah Oldham, Patrick Capiello, David Sink and Josefa Concannon.

After a warm greeting from Mélanie and Benoît, we took a quick walk to *Pierre de Bellevue*, a nearby parcel characterized by the thinnest soils in the Marne valley.



From there, Benoît started breaking it down for us.



All in all, the Tarlants work 57 single parcels. Most are in Oeuilly but the vines are spread over four villages: Oeuilly, Celles-lès-Condé, Boursault and Saint-Agnan. Sparnagian soils (clay and limestone) are located on the higher portion of the hillsides, with more chalk on the bottom.

In Oeuilly, most of the vines are exposed east/northeast:



Being so close to the Marne river helps in dampening the effect of sunlight, allowing the grapes to mature very slowly. This is great for both concentration and acidity.

The other main village for the Tarlant's vines is called Celles-lès-Condé. Mostly Pinot noir is planted there, and the slopes are very steep and south facing. The total surface of the vineyards makes up 50% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay, 15% Pinot Meunier and 5% of Champagne's "forgotten" grapes: Pinot Blanc, Arbanne and Petit Meslier. The vines average at 35 years old, with the oldest around 70-ish.



Everyone was really cold, so we walked back to the Tarlant cellar to taste.



Maybe it was the jetlag, but the lighting was super trippy. Also, who knows where this leads?



Our friend Gaboush bravely went down there to explore and never came back, so we'll never know. Anyway, let's get back to being serious. While in the cellar, Benoît was quick to point out that:

"The simpler winemaking can be, the better it is."

Yet immediately after telling us this, we were explained that of the 57 vineyards, everything is harvested and vinified separately! All in all, there will be around 80 individual wines for Benoît to work with and blend EACH VINTAGE! That doesn't sound all that simple!

Fermentation is done 2/3 in barrel and 1/3 tank, always from indigenous yeast. Usually, young vines are fermented in tank. Very little is done to the wine, save a few batonnâges towards the end of fermentation for the yeasts to finish off the last grams of RS. Malolactic fermentation is rare and not what Benoît is looking for.



To ensure this, only new barrels are brought into the winery. About 3 to 5% on barrels are renewed every year, and Benoît prefers purchasing these in more powerful vintages so that the wood marks the wine less. Only the best juices are used for brand new barrels.



Tasting of the vins clairs begins in January. Benoît's first focus is always on making the best Brut Nature, then the rosé, then the single vineyard wines. Each year, one third of the harvest is kept as reserve wine.

Guess what else Benoît has been tinkering with?



Yup, amphoras. The big one has Chardonnay, the small one has Pinot Noir.

And though it isn't necessarily shocking for us to see tinajas/amphoras getting play in cellars these days ([here is a list of people who use them](#)), it still came as a surprise seeing these in the Tarlant

cellar.

"I'm was very lucky that my family has always encouraged me to experiment with different ways of doing things."

Benoît is waiting to see if it brings anything extra to the wine, or if the secondary fermentation covers up anything that differs from the other barrel fermented wines. Regardless of the results, it's experiments like these that show how truly dedicated Benoît is to pushing things forward. He is truly next level in the cellar, and the work ethic is both impressive and inspiring.



From the cellar, we headed back up to the tasting room. But before we were allowed to taste any bottled Champagne, Mélanie had us all sign our names on two magnums of *Cuvée Louis*.



"We'll drink these next time you all come visit!"

From there, it was an all-out taste-a-thon of current and soon to be releases:



EXCLUSIVE: Get ready for this 2003 vintage wine, *La Matinale*.



CHAMPAGNE
TARLANT
VIGNERONS DEPUIS 1687

2003

PRESTIGE MILLÉSIME

la Matinale

Plus we got to eat a really healthy, hearty meal from Mme Tarlant senior!

