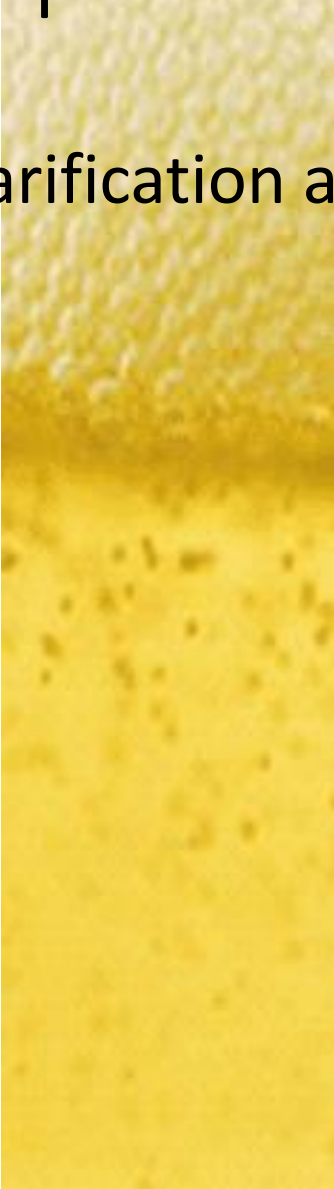




Preparation of cuve

- Clarification and blending





Post-malo treatments

- Adjustment of SO_2 level
- CLARIFICATION or FINING
- BLENDING
- COLD STABILISATION
- FILTRATION
- LABORATORY CONTROL

Final stage: clarification

- Clarification may involve fining, filtering (using kieselguhr earth, membrane/cartridge-type filters or pad filters) cross-flow filtration or centrifuging.
- The aim is to eliminate the lees and other impurities, producing clear, natural base wines (known locally as 'vins clairs') that are ready for blending as a 'cuvee' (local term for a blended Champagne).
- Base wines are classified by varietal, vintage, vineyard (or sometimes the individual vineyard plot) and pressing fraction (whether cuvee or taille).



The Art of BLENDING

- CHAMPAGNE « hidden secret ».
- Belongs to each house style.
- Searching for balance, harmony and finesse.
- Expressing grape variety, terroir, vintage at their best .
- Winemaker's touch.

Blending

- The blending process at the heart of Champagne winemaking plays on the diversity of nature, combining wines from different crus (growths), different grape varieties and different years.
- Champagne blending usually encompasses all of these three dimensions, though the winemaker may decide to focus on one dimension in particular.
- A vintage Champagne commemorates a truly exceptional year by including no reserve wines at all..
- A single-varietal Champagne, whether Blanc de Blancs or Blanc de Noirs, celebrates the taste of a single grape variety.
- A single-vineyard Champagne expresses the distinctive qualities of a single cru, 'lieu-dit' (named vineyard plot) or sometimes a 'clos' (walled vineyard).

Three dimensions of Champagne blending:

1. Blending wines from different crus:

There are so many subtle differences between the crus that no two blends are ever the same. The result is an array of wines that capture the multifaceted character of their appellation;

2. Blending wines from different but complementary grape varieties

Marrying different grape varieties brings contrasting and complementary qualities to Champagne wines.

- The Pinot Noir contributes aromas of red fruits and adds strength and body to the blend.
- The Pinot Meunier, the fastest-maturing component in Champagne, contributes supple body, intense fruit and roundness.
- The Chardonnay gives the blend finesse. As a young wine, it brings floral notes, sometimes with a mineral edge. It is the slowest to mature of the three Champagne varieties and the longest-lived.

Three dimensions of Champagne blending:

3. Blending wines from different years

The annual weather variations in Champagne affect the quality of the grapes, making for very different vintages depending on how cold, hot, wet, etc it was in the year in question.

Fourth dimension of blending: the winemaker's talent

- By combining wines with different sensory characteristics (colours, aromas, flavours) the Champagne maker looks to create a wine that is greater than the sum of its parts – one with a carefully balanced harmony of notes in which no one note is dominant. The ultimate objective is the same today as it has always been: to create a sense of balance that is not found naturally and could not exist without human intervention.
- The Champagne blender brings together contrasting wines to create a cuvee that is different every time and distinctly superior in quality to the sum of its parts.

Blending is the prelude to the other steps in the Méthode Champenoise, creating a harmonious balance of flavours that will be made more emphatic still by second fermentation, aging on lees, riddling, disgorgement and dosage.



Stabilisation

Once blending is complete, the wine undergoes cold stabilisation: the process of chilling wine prior to bottling to induce crystallisation of tartaric acid (particularly important for sparkling wines), so preventing crystal formation in the finished product. The wine is held at a very low temperature (-4°C) for at least a week and sometimes much longer; or for a faster effect, it may be seeded with cream of tartar crystals. Renewed clarification then leaves the wine perfectly clear.