



*Perfectly align modern techniques with more traditional methods in order
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for future generations...*

CHAMPAGNE **LAFORGE TESTA**

by *Petronella Salvi*

This year, 2013, is a joyous occasion! Champagne Laforge Testa will celebrate its centenary between July and September.

A hundred years of history and a Champagne house with the viticulture, the cellars, the perseverance, passion and devotion it required from

all the passing generations to the present day. Situated in the Marne Valley at the village Charly sur Marne, stretching from Nanteuil and passing

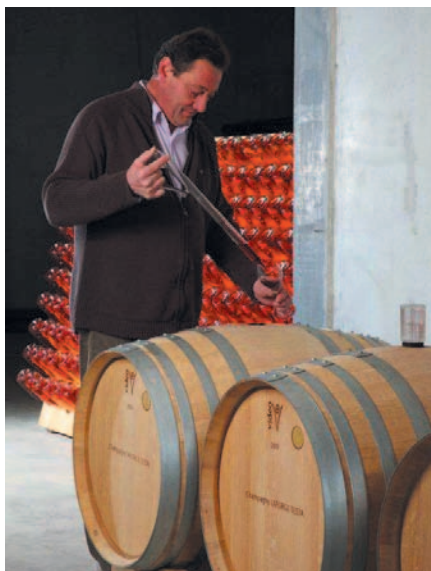
by the hamlet of Crouttes, which was classified as fine “terroir” back in 1908 and all of the vineyards surrounding the commune bear the prestigious AOC Champagne. The

terroir of Laforge Testa is made up of only calcareous clay and thus ideally suited for the producing of quality Champagne as attests the different

“cuvées” of Champagne Laforge

Testa, particular where planted along the slopes of the hillsides, the

“Coteaux”.



Between 1980 – 1988 the previous generation decided to plant Chardonnay on these slopes and today, the vineyard is made up of 40% Chardonnay vines with an average age of 30 years. Four generations of the family have been installed here and have slowly, but surely built the reputation of this house over the last century. They have managed to perfectly align modern techniques with more traditional methods in order to produce the best and, at the same time, to preserve their land for future generations by adhering to the principles of sustainable viticulture, which encompasses a profound respect of the environment in all its aspects. This attitude and way of life also results in the crafting (in the noble meaning of the word) of top quality grapes, essential to the making of a quality wine. This philosophy is visible in the sober lines of the house, the vinification installations and other buildings as well as in the stylistically straightforward, yet elegantly labelled and packaged bottles, but it also illustrates perfectly the continuity of the family and its principles.

Great grandfather planted the first vines and today Laforge Testa reaps the harvest in quality of his foresight. The present generation continues the excellent work started by the family so long ago and the next generation is being prepared for when the time comes. Each passing generation has left an indelible mark on the heritage of the family and on the improvement of the quality of its wines.

Be it the first parcels of vines planted in 1913 by Emile and Léonie Laforge, the founder of the Laforge Testa Champagne House. Followed by Pierre Laforge, their son or Jean-Pierre, their grandson, both of whom modernised and enlarged the property. In the 1950's, Pierre and his wife Renée-Jeanne believed in innovation and were the first in the region to buy a straddle or high-clearance tractor. In the 1980's, it was Jean-Pierre and his wife Astrid who took the decision to plant parcel situated against the slopes of the famous Champagne “Coteaux”. Since 1995, Armelle Testa, great granddaughter of Emile Laforge, and her husband José Testa manage Champagne Laforge Testa. Armelle Testa looks after the administrative management and the marketing of the different wines, while José Testa is responsible for the viticultural care of the vineyard and part of the vinification, the actual transformation from base wine to Champagne.

In the vineyards emphasis is put on the training of the vines and a rigorous pruning after the vintage ensures the quality of the grapes to come.

Parcelar maturity analysis helps towards the establishing of the optimum moment to start the vintage, at which time the sugar/acidity content is practically identical.

Obviously, nature is an unpredictable master and some years are more difficult than others. Hence, the need of selective pickings to ensure the perfect level of maturity in the grapes over the period of time of the vintage.

Healthy and well matured grapes are primordial to the quality of the Champagne. As a result, viticulture lavishes care and attention on each vine to ensure healthy, top quality berries and Laforge Testa trust its pickers, some of whom have been vintaging at this Champagne house for over 20 years. They have the experience and the knowledge to pick with parsimony and can thus also transmit this craft and art to the next generation.

Armelle and José Testa have remained faithful to and firmly believe in the superiority of the traditional, vertical Champagne press, which liberates the juice from the grapes delicately and slowly, thus preserving all the quality and intrinsic fragrance and aromas as well. After alcoholic fermentation all the wine undergoes their malolactic fermentation before maturing in wooden vats of 50 hectolitre capacity. This ensures suppleness without damaging the wine with wood flavours.

After bottling, which usually follows in the spring after the vintage, the wine matures for between 4 and 10 years in the Laforge Testa cellars. The bottles are still traditionally riddled on the traditional, wooden, riddling frames. An art and a dexterity that require huge experience and precision as well as a good memory. This is an essential step in the making of Champagne and hand riddling is becoming a rarity! Just as the composition and the quality of the “liqueur de tirage”, usually from matured, reserve wine and sugar, is essential for the birth of the bubbles, which is responsible for the sparkle in Champagne and which continues procure such pleasure and fascination. The sugar content creates either Demi Sec or Burt Champagne.



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To coincide with the happiness of the centenary celebration a brand new “cuvée” is to be presented.

A new label, the Blanc de Blancs made from

100% Chardonnay grapes, promises to live up to the expectations and will be the state of the art of Chardonnay expression

with fruit, purity and freshness as well as overall balance.

Vintage Champagne and none less than **2000** Champagne Laforge Testa. This lovingly matured wine from a remarkable vintage and blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay shows depth, elegance and delicious freshness, in spite of the fact that is from 2000. A balanced roundness concludes the complexity of this historic vintage. The 2000 Vintage won a silver medal at the “Effervescents du Monde” competition. The development of potentially vintaged Champagne is being watched carefully and a decision will be made soon – the 2002.

The **2004** Vintage, which is a blend of half Chardonnay and half Pinot Noir, offers a wonderful expression of elegance and complexity and also won a silver medal at the “Effervescents du Monde” competition.

The **Grande Réserve**, which is a blend of all three the grape varieties: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, with delectable liveliness presents floral and mineral tones, so totally reminiscent of Chardonnay. Lovely vivacity, yet charm followed by a lingering aftertaste. Medalled at the 2011 “Effervescents du Monde” competition.

Champagne Laforge Testa **Rosé** with the Pinot Noir forming the majority in the blend with Chardonnay, is a fresh and fruited, harmonious Champagne with a most attractive rosé colour. This is also a festive yet refined and feminine Rosé. Also won a medal at the 2012 “Challenge du Vin”.

A red **Coteau Champenois** wine is made from a plot of Pinot Noir of a minimum of 25 years and is vinified and matured in oak barrel. This is the ideal red wine at a gastronomic feast accompanied by several, different Laforge Testa Champagnes with its divers styles or levels of sweetness.

Champagne Laforge Testa has a bright future ahead, securely rooted in this particular county of Champagne, yet ready to face the challenges of the present and preparing courageously for tomorrow.



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