

TOP BAROLO | CABERNET SAUVIGNON | RIOJA | YEAR'S BEST CHAMPAGNE

# Wine & Spirits

## HOLIDAY REDS

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## Champagne

months prior to aging on the lees in bottle. The concentration of the 2016 vintage shows in the youthful intensity of this wine, with an intriguing meunier scent of wild red berries, tart and not obvious. The pale wine gives an impression of transparent red fruit that feels bright and dynamic, lasting on floral notes of apple butter.

### 91 | Leclerc Briant \$95

**Champagne Extra Brut Rosé** This is a rustic, country Champagne with flavors of the earth. Based on chardonnay, it includes seven percent red wine from pinot noir, knitting macerated strawberry flavors into chardonnay's leesy tannins. Welcoming and friendly.

### 90 | Leclerc Briant \$85

**Champagne Brut Réserve** Focused on red grapes (pinots noir and meunier, 40 percent each), this gives an impression of sweet, blue-black grape skins in its soft red fruit, while golden, oxidative tones bring scents of butterscotch and white tea to the finish. For rich shellfish, like oysters Rockefeller.

## LEGRAS & HAAS

Négociant-Manipulant in Chouilly. Annual Production: 11,000 cases. Imported by Demeine Estates, St. Helena, CA

### 95 | Legras & Haas \$175

**2014 Champagne Grand Cru Chouilly Les Sillons** This chardonnay grows at a parcel the Legras family farms in the northwestern corner of their hometown, the grand cru village of Chouilly. It's a direct Côte des Blancs Champagne, buzzing with chalky energy, jasmine freshness and formidable, brisk and lasting drive. If you decant it to bring out the lemon scents and cool, saline minerality, the wine takes on a silken feel. A friendly, characterful wine that could only be grown in Champagne.

### 93 | Legras & Haas \$115

**2015 Champagne Grand Cru Chouilly Brut Blanc de Blancs** This estate-grown chardonnay is focused on the Legras' parcels in the *lieu-dit* of Mont Aigu, south of the town of Chouilly. Rich, elegant and chalky, this is an austere dry wine from a dry season in Champagne. New York sommelier Julia Bramowitz described it as a Grace Kelly wine, for the sleekness of its white-citrus fruit. You might also find floral notes of kumquat and the red blush of persimmon in this wine's mouthwatering flavors, which may, in turn make you hungry for fried calamari, fried oysters, fried chicken...

### 90 | Legras & Haas \$80

**Champagne Grand Cru Chouilly Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs** Framing buttery richness within gingery spice, this feels soft and cushioned by its bubbles. It's salty and sweet, with an umami undertone of kelp and nutty jicama. Chill it for a Cantonese steamed whole fish with ginger and leeks.

## MANDOIS

Négociant-Manipulant in Pierry. Annual Production: 41,700 cases. Imported by Albert Bichot USA, NY

### 92 | Mandois \$56

**Champagne Brut Origine (BEST BUY)** Based in Pierry, the Mandois family blends this wine from chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier. It's simple, lively and fresh, holding sweet mineral clarity without any aggression. A little bit of joy in Champagne.

## LOUIS ROEDERER

Négociant-Manipulant in Reims. Imported by Maisons Marques & Domaines USA, Oakland, CA



### 98 | Louis Roederer \$400

**2015 Champagne Brut Cristal** Ripened to fragrant white-peach flavors in the heat of the 2015 vintage, the biodynamically farmed fruit for Cristal transforms that ripeness into a delicate juiciness, the wine both luscious and youthfully concentrated, almost severe in its structure. None of the wine undergoes malolactic conversion, and a quarter of the base wine ages in oak; particularly in this vintage, Cristal is built for the long haul, rather than for drinking on release. Spicy and subtle, this wine's earthiness is incipient, not yet revealed, like a groundnut—not the peanut, but the native-American tuber with a flavor that might literally be described as a *pomme de terre* (an apple of the earth). Sophisticated and layered, this wine hums with a quiet energy.

### 98 | Louis Roederer \$800

**2014 Champagne Brut Cristal Rosé** Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon describes the spring of 2014 as sunny and dry, leading up to a heat wave in June. Then a cool, wet summer ended with the return of the dry, sunny heat in September. When our panel tasted the Cristal 2014 last year, I found it confusing, but the Cristal 2014 Rosé is a different beast. With its pale pink color and tight *saignée* essence of fruit, it's both saturated and lithe; the wine's freshness feels like the sky opening from a summer rain into the sun. Its flavor depths of golden raspberry, barely-pink grapefruit, roasted autumn apple and toasty pumpkin seed hide a dark rosé within the complex flavors of a pale yet intricately detailed white wine. As a young vintage, it yields to the touch, like a tightening muscle, needing a decade or more of cellar time to begin to give itself more completely.

### 96 | Louis Roederer \$110

**2015 Champagne Brut Vintage** In the heat and ripeness of 2015, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon balanced the concentration of chardonnay from Chouilly with the freshness of pinot noir from the northeast-facing slopes of Verzy. He managed that pinot noir from cold soils and a cool climate by allowing a portion of the lot to undergo malolactic conversion, something he hadn't done in the past. (He has increased this focus in subsequent vintages, reporting that Roederer's 2019 Vintage is 100 percent pinot noir from Verzy, as are 2020 and 2022.) The wine has Roederer's hallmark clarity and grace—fresh, fragrant, compelling in its texture that's all about chalk, heady in its savory richness, seeming to invest its inherent energy in the knitting of all its elements into one dynamic moment of grace.

### 95 | Louis Roederer \$115

**2016 Champagne Brut Blanc de Blancs** Pale and beautiful in its chalk structure under flavors of lemon and grapefruit pith, this is youthfully vibrant and just plain delicious: chardonnay from the white chalk of Avize. About a quarter of the base wine aged in oak, a shadow of pale pistachio behind the wine's freshness. What lasts is a clean sense of minerality, a mouthwatering structure that should sustain this for years in the cellar.

### 94 | Louis Roederer \$189

**2020 Coteaux Champenois Homage à Camille Le Mesnil-sur-Oger** This chardonnay grows at a southeast-facing slope, a 1.36-acre parcel farmed by Roederer in the *lieu-dit* Volibarts, in the Côte des Blancs grand cru