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Dumangin Champagne – Small is Beautiful

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The French can be so charming, especially those promoting fine Champagnes! So too was Gilles Dumangin, the fifth generation winemaker of this family-owned house. Gilles is indeed one of those 'small winemakers', not so much diminutive in stature, but rather in the size of his business. The house, has been involved with wine for some time, family members recorded growing grapes in 1623, and making wines from 1895 in the Montagne de Reims village of Chigny Les Roses, where 60% of the plantings are to Pinot Meunier. The family holdings only cover 6 ha, but this is supplemented by purchased fruit. Even though, only 12,500 dozen bottles are made on average annually. This is beneficial in that one man can effectively oversee the whole process, ensuring the highest standards and guiding the style the desired direction. Gilles is very aware of international trends and has incorporated some of the advances, such as using Diam corks. He is aware of his preferences and of what constitutes good tradition. Listening to Gilles talk about his work, life is certainly busy, but very productive.

It was a pleasure to taste a selection of his Champagnes and wines that are imported into New Zealand by Michael Jemison of MacVine. Here are my brief notes on the wines tasted. All of the wines state 12.0% alc. on the label:

Introducing the tasting was the **Dumangin Champagne 1er Cru 'Brut Grande Reserve' NV** (16.5+/20), 50% PM, 25% PN and 25% Ch., 10 g/L rs, 40% 2006 vintage and 60% reserve wine, aged 3 years on lees. Pale straw-yellow in colour, this has a tight, fresh, but fruity nose with excellent bready autolysis notes. Dryish on palate, this is an elegant wine marked by black fruit fleshy style and moderate autolysis. This has refreshing acidity, finishing light and dry. An aperitif style to enjoy without bottle-age.

Then the **Dumangin Champagne 1er Cru 'Extra Brut' NV** (18.5-/20), 50% PM, 25% PN and 25% Ch., only 2 g/L rs, mainly 2004 vintage fruit, on lees 5 years. Light straw-yellow in colour, this has a very powerful, intense and complex bouquet of toast and autolysis. Dry on palate, this has great depth of toasty autolysis flavours, the palate showing great concentration yet finesse of texture. Long and nuanced on the finish, this is a statement wine that deserves food pairing, and will be enjoyable now and over the next 3+ years. This was followed by the **Dumangin Champagne 1er Cru 'Premium Blanc de Blanc' NV (17.5+/20)**, 100% Ch. from a single vineyard, based on 70% 2005 vintage with 30% reserve wine, 10 g/L rs, on lees 4 years. Very pale straw-yellow in colour, this has a softly full nose of exotic florals and gentle, nutty-toasty aromas of autolysis. Dryish to taste, the soft white florals and citrus, mineral flavours have a subtle, rounded breadth, yet the sense of delicacy pervades this wine. Not nearly as crisp and piercing as a Cote de Blancs wine. Serve as an aperitif, or with seafood, especially shellfish over the next 3-5 years.

The specialty wines were served next. The cuvee that has the largest production is the **Dumangin Champagne 1er Cru 'Brut Rosé' NV** (17.5+/20), the white component ranging from 91-82% of the final blend, being 54% Ch., and 46% PN, and the red component PM aged in oak 12 months, making 9-18% of the final blend. 10 g/L rs, aged on lees 3 years. Very pale pink colour, this has a very soft and delicate bouquet of strawberries and beautifully subtle red florals. Dryish on palate, this has fine, lush strawberry flavours with delicate savoury autolysis and acidity. The faintest textural grip is noticeable, but this is in total balance with the wine. Rich seafood and poultry will match this well over the next 2-3+ years. The final Champagne was the **Dumangin Champagne 1er Cru 'Vintage' 2003** (18.5+/20), 54% Ch. and 46% PN, 10 g/L rs, given 8 years on lees. This has a bright pale straw colour with green hues. Rich on nose with fruity PN volume and floral lift, this has breadth on the bouquet with layers of bready, toasty autolysis unfolding in the glass. Dry to taste, this is a wine of balance and interest. Richness and restraint show simultaneously, with definite autolytic complexity and freshness from the acidity. A wine that will be versatile with food over the next 5-6+ years.

Last to be served was the **Dumangin Ratafia de Champagne (18.0-/20)**, a complex mistelle vin de liqueur, with neutral spirit added to achieve 18.0% alc. The base wine includes a Vin Santo-like component, vintage ratafia and 20% tank-aged juice for freshness. Pale tawny colour, the bouquet shows cinnamon and spices with ripe tropical fruits and figs, nuts, baking, brown sugar and oaky rancio. At 150 g/L rs, this is sweet, but in no way cloying. The palate reflects the nose and is clean without any cloying. Good spirit provides a clean and fine finish. This will match a range of desserts, cheeses and chocolate.