



Champagne: Bollinger's La Côte aux Enfants 2012–2015, Vieilles Vignes Françaises 2004–2016 and More

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Pinot Noir has long been at the heart of Bollinger's identity, accounting for approximately 60% of their vineyard holdings. Yet, excluding the small-scale Vieilles Vignes Françaises, it was only in recent years that the house began to bottle Pinot Noir on its own. This shift began with the introduction of their non-vintage PN series—Champagnes that vary in composition from year to year—followed by a single-vineyard (lieu-dit) bottling from La Côte aux Enfants.

Contrary to some misconceptions, La Côte aux Enfants today is not solely dedicated to Champagne production: still red wine under the Coteaux Champenois designation continues to be made from this site. However, it's important to distinguish between the two: the Coteaux Champenois is crafted from grapes grown on the vineyard's south-facing slope, whereas the fruit destined for Champagne comes from the northwest-facing side.



Clos Chaudes-Terres in Aÿ, one of the last two surviving sites of ungrafted Pinot Noir vines that supply Bollinger's Blanc de Noirs Vieilles Vignes Françaises

This report, along with the accompanying tasting notes, centers on Pinot Noir, offering a comprehensive exploration of Bollinger's interpretations—from every rendition of La Côte aux Enfants and multiple vintages of Vieilles Vignes Françaises to the house's newest non-vintage PN series.

What's new at Bollinger? In anticipation of its 200th anniversary in 2029, the estate is undergoing significant work. This includes expanded facilities to accommodate their extensive collection of oak barrels, used for fermenting Pinot Noir and Chardonnay sourced from premier and grand cru vineyards. Readers may recall that Bollinger fully eliminated the use of herbicides in 2016, an initiative that began in 2009 with the impulse to rehabilitate their emblematic vineyards, Vieilles Vignes Françaises and La Côte aux Enfants, and which gradually expanded to encompass all their holdings. What is less known is that all 180 hectares under Bollinger's ownership—accounting for roughly half of the house's needs—are currently undergoing organic conversion, a process slated for completion in 2026. While Bollinger has long employed an in-house cooper—responsible for the upkeep of 228-liter barrels until they reach 40 years of age and 410-liter barrels until 80 to 100 years—since 2019, the house has embarked on producing a small number of its own barrels. These are made using oak sourced from the family-owned forest in Cuis. The

remainder of their extensive barrel inventory continues to be supplemented with second-hand barrels acquired from Burgundy.



Bollinger's 1937 Brut Vintage (on the right) bears the historic label "Renaudin-Bollinger & Cie." This bottle embodies the very essence of what one hopes to discover when opening a perfectly cellared old vintage Champagne.

For non-vintage Champagnes such as the new Blanc de Noirs PN TX20, reserve wines undergo fermentation in both stainless steel and oak vessels. Notably, if fermentation takes place in steel, *élevage* is carried out in the same medium. In contrast, reserve wines that are fermented and vinified in oak are subsequently matured in magnums. If there is one critique to be made of this *cuvée*—particularly in light of the discourse on advancing viticultural practices and the likelihood that it will be consumed relatively young—it is that the somewhat generous dosage of eight grams per liter makes itself felt on the finish at this early stage.

Pinot Noir typically demonstrates a greater susceptibility to oxidation than Chardonnay. To mitigate this tendency, oxygen exposure during the winemaking process is now managed with greater precision than in the past, through measures such as fewer rackings, limiting filtration to a single instance and employing jetting. Notably, this is accomplished without an overreliance on sulfur dioxide: in fact, sulfite levels have been halved compared to the house's historical practices.



Ascending the slope to La Côte aux Enfants in Aÿ, navigating the vineyard's dramatic 39% gradient alongside Bollinger's chef de cave, Denis Bunner, en route to one of the area's most scenic sites—so steep one might imagine it better suited for skiing

When I asked Bollinger's chef de cave, Denis Bunner, whether he had ever showcased a full vertical of La Côte aux Enfants, I was surprised to hear that no one had requested this before. This scenic Aÿ vineyard spans four hectares, evenly split between still red and sparkling wine production and is notable for its formidable 39% gradient—so steep one might imagine it better suited for skiing—and its shallow topsoil, consisting of just 30 centimeters of clay-limestone with high percentages of active calcium. The slope is maintained with cover crops to minimize erosion. Stylistically, the Champagnes from La Côte aux Enfants are finer boned and more tensile, defined by purity as much as power, especially when contrasted with the ample and textural PN series and the dramatic and intensely flavored Vieilles Vignes Françaises.



A complete vertical of Blanc de Noirs La Côte aux Enfants, with every vintage produced as of this writing

Turning to Vieilles Vignes Françaises, this bottling now originates from two walled parcels of ungrafted Pinot Noir—Clos Saint-Jacques and Clos Chaudes-Terres—both situated adjacent to the Bollinger house. These plots were replanted in the 1970s using massal selections from Aÿ, meaning the vines should not be mistaken for remnants of the pre-phylloxera era. While the soils here are not sandy—a feature that aided vine survival in certain other Champagne sites—it is possibly the protective walls of these vineyards that have thus far shielded them from infiltration by phylloxera, the insect that ravaged vine roots throughout most of Europe. The recently released 2016 rendition—harvested at a relatively modest 10.2% potential alcohol—marries the Pinot Noir richness and old-vine concentration with the freshness of the growing season and recent disgorgement, taming some of the Vieilles Vignes Françaises’ characteristic exuberance. While older VVF vintages cited in the accompanying tasting notes may prove challenging to obtain, this report offers insight into their present condition for the fortunate few who hold some of the 1,000 bottles produced.