

Joseph Perrier Blanc de Blancs 2002

10 Aug 2010 by Jancis Robinson

From £39.95 (less than initially thought!)

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Joseph Perrier is an unusual champagne house. Based many miles south east of the traditional heartland of the Champagne region in the town of Chalons-sur-Marne (now called, more alluringly, Chalons-en-Champagne), this family firm was founded in 1825, which means that this year is its 185th anniversary. One might think that a 175th anniversary were worthier of celebration than a 185th, but president Jean-Claude Fourmon seems to have been inspired by the quality of the 2002 vintage, just starting to drink beautifully now, to launch a pair of special vintage bottlings, one white and one pink, in honour of the anniversary.

The last time Joseph Perrier launched a new wine was in 1982 with Cuvée Josephine. The last one before that was apparently in 1911, but I didn't witness that one.

I must say that I have not been particularly excited by Joseph Perrier champagnes for quite a while now, but I absolutely love this **Joseph Perrier Blanc de Blancs 2002 Champagne**. It manages to combine the raciness of an all-Chardonnay champagne with a delicate texture, perfect balance, some light but not overwhelming evidence of autolysis, the biscuity effect of ageing the wine on the lees of the second fermentation in bottle, with real persistence. It dances on the palate and would make both a lovely wine as an aperitif, even if it is less steely than, for example, a Pierre Moncuit Blanc de Blancs would be.

It is based on Chardonnay grown in grand cru and premier cru vineyards in Cumières, Mesnil-sur-Oger and Avize and was only recently disgorged after nearly eight years' ageing on lees.

For the moment it seems to be available exclusively in the UK and France but I dare say it will make its way to more distant markets before long. No smart champagne is cheap, alas, and the lowest price I can find this at is £39.95 from Hennings Wine Merchants. But then 2002 is a very good vintage for champagne, and there are very few 2002 Blanc de Blancs champagnes on sale in the UK for less than this (Le Mesnil from the wine co-operative there is a notable exception).

Champagne houses seem to vie with each other for who can produce the most distinctive bottle. This rather bulbous one (the picture is not especially revealing, alas) is modelled on a bottle they found in the archives that was used in the 1860s for selling a wine labelled not Champagne but 'Ay Mousseux'.

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