

# The golden touch

By Brent Gregston



## Not all champagnes are created equal

It is difficult, when talking about a great champagne, to look beyond the bubbles. After all, a single glass contains more than 21 million of them. But that wasn't the case when Champagne Gosset, the oldest winery in the Champagne region, was founded in Aÿ in 1584. The region's wines were not at all bubbly. It was only in the early 18th century, when wine was sealed in bottles rather than stored in barrels, that it began to sparkle. The subtle bubbles that excite so much passion today were a source of terror – bubbles could turn a bottle of wine into a time bomb. One detonation could set off a chain reaction and destroy an entire cellar. Sparkling wine was *le vin du diable* – the

devil's wine. Dom Perignon, the monk falsely credited with inventing Champagne, actually spent most of his life trying to stop bottles from exploding.

In keeping with their pre-bubbly tradition, Gosset champagnes are, first and foremost, wines that pay homage to the pinot noir grape. Gosset is almost alone among the major champagne producers (along with Krug and Lanson) to forego a process called malolactic fermentation, which makes it easier and cheaper to produce champagne. As a result, Gosset champagne has the aromas and powerful flavors associated with still wines. It matures more slowly and is therefore aged longer than other big-name brands. Gosset champagne also has staying power. Wine connoisseurs can keep a bottle in the cellar for 10 or even 20 years.

"It is wine first of all, the bubbly part comes later," explains Jean-Pierre Mareigner, their *chef de cave* or cellar master. For him, that "is and always will be the golden rule." Mareigner has been with Gosset for so many years he is nicknamed *la mémoire*. After each harvest, he purchases the best grapes from 200 trusted growers and ferments them in separate vats until the still wines are ready for the assemblage, the process in which they're bottled and become champagne.

His Grande Réserve Gosset won the Grappe d'Or (best wine of the year) in the *Guide Hachette 2010*, following a tasting of almost 36,000 still wines and 2,000 champagnes. "I was familiar with the style of Champagne Gosset long before I ever came to work for them," says Mareigner. "I didn't create this style of champagne nor did my predecessors. It has been handed down from generation to generation."