

TASTE & TRAVEL

INTERNATIONAL

OKTOBERFEST
GERMANY

FALLING FOR
THE KAWARTHAS

PINTXOS
SAN SEBASTIAN

FOOD AND DRINK
SHANGHAI

ON THE TRAIL
CHAMPAGNE

Expand your culinary horizons

PLUS

DUBAI

PUERTO

MORELOS

LONDON

ISTANBUL

IRELAND

Ottawa
COOKS

ISSUE 23 Autumn 2016

T&T CAD/US \$6.95



FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read*, LOVE TO *eat* AND LOVE TO *travel*

FRANCE

On the Champagne Trail

by LAURA SUTHERLAND

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD *Dom Perignon
Champagne; Dilettantes
Maison du Champagne.*

LAURA SUTHERLAND

FRANCE

CHAMPAGNE



France

WHERE ON EARTH

Champagne Trail



THIS PHOTO *Dilettantes Maison du Champagne* tasting room.

...An estimated one billion bottles of champagne are aging in miles of ancient cellars, caves, and tunnels...

THIS IS THE WAY TO KICK IT OFF, I thought — with a chilled bottle of Duval-Leroy champagne in the ice bucket and two glasses sparkling with liquid luxury. Champagne touches were everywhere in our Parisian hotel room — the bedside tables looked like oversized muselets

— the wire muzzles that hold corks on champagne bottles — golden bubbles were backlit across an entire wall, and the bathroom sink resembled a scaled-up champagne cork. Our Left Bank hotel, Les Bulles de Paris, overflowed with exuberant champagne-themed décor.

As a champagne enthusiast... no a champagne *fanatic*, I was starting my research on the effervescent celebration-in-a-bottle in Paris, and in addition to our festive hotel, we had a few stops to make before we immersed ourselves in all things bubbly in the Champagne region itself — just a 45-minute train ride from Paris.

First up was Dilettantes Maison du Champagne, a shop and tasting room that showcases 25 artisanal producers. We hurried past 125 different chilled bottles for purchase and

went straight to the 17th-century vaulted cellar that owner Fanny Heucq, daughter of champagne makers, has transformed into an homage to *récoltant manipulateurs*, the small producers who grow grapes and make champagne on their premises. Walls are lined with information about each winery and a changing tasting flight of three cuvées is always available to sample. We loved the toasty and full-flavoured Bernard Torny Cuvée Brut from the aptly named village of Bouzy so much that we ordered some to include in a case of champagnes to ship home.

It was nearly Paris Fashion Week, so at our next stop, Bar 8 at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, the people watching was almost as compelling as the refined Billecart-Salmon Brut we tasted. Around us, flamboyant designers and leggy models chatted over their own chilled glasses of bubbly from a carefully curated champagne list.

At Le Bar in the glamorous Hotel Plaza Athénée, we sipped unusual champagne cocktails, like *mojitos* made with champagne instead of soda. Yes, champagne cocktails are blasphemous to champagne purists, but the buzz about these prompted us to order a few of the exotic concoctions.

The next day we climbed aboard a high-speed train and were soon wheeling our luggage the few blocks from the downtown Reims train station to the upscale Hotel de la Paix Best Western, centrally located with its own impressive champagne bar. Reims is Champagne's biggest town, with an historic cathedral where French kings have been crowned for centuries. But the real action is underground, where an estimated one billion bottles of champagne are aging in miles of ancient cellars, caves and tunnels. Extravagant brands like Taittinger, Veuve Clicquot and Ruinart are headquartered here and all offer fascinating tours and tastings. UNESCO has recently given Champagne's cellars, as well as its champagne houses and hillsides, World Heritage status. Visitors to the region often limit themselves to visiting the big brands, but smaller producers, like those represented at Dilletantes, are well worth contacting for a tour and tasting.

When we'd finished exploring Reims we picked up a car and drove through rolling hills checkered with pinot noir, pinot meunier, and chardonnay vines — the only grapes that can be used to make champagne (and it must be made here to be labeled true champagne). It's the blending of these three grapes (or just one or two), plus the chalky soil, harsh northern climate and vintners' artistry that makes champagne unique.

Along the way we stopped in Épernay, one of the wealthiest towns in the region where 90 percent of the population works in wine. Its 'Avenue du Champagne' is a mile-long boulevard lined with stately palaces like Moët & Chandon, Pol Roger and Perrier-Jouët. We resisted the temptation to taste in every house so we could spend more time in the countryside trying champagnes we could never find back home.

One of our favourite independent producers was J. Lassalle, run by three generations of women in tiny Chigny-les-Roses. Daughter Angeline took us on a tour of the cellars and when we returned upstairs to sip a Première Cru Blanc de Blancs, (100 percent chardonnay), her 94-year-old, pearl- and cashmere-bedecked grandmother made a gracious appearance.

A visit to Fanny of Dilettante's small family winery, Heucq Père et Fils, was a must, so we made our way to Cuisles where this third-generation champagne maker has a tasting room. It was a treat to have Fanny's father — who focuses on the meunier grape — pouring us his Extra-brut, made of 90 percent pinot meunier and 10 percent pinot noir.

That night over dinner at our hotel, La Briqueterie outside of Épernay, we marvelled at the seven-page, 200-plus bottle champagne list and concentrated on sparklers made by the small grower/producers within a few miles of the restaurant, like sixth-generation Vollereaux.»



JULIETHOMAS RETOUCHE2013

PHOTOS THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP *Hotel de Ville; Picnic in the vineyards with La Vigne du Roy Tour Company; Champagne tasting; Champagne makers at J. Lassalle, grandmother Olga and daughter Angeline.*



LAURA SUTHERLAND



LAURA SUTHERLAND



LAURA SUTHERLAND

Cook
&

FRANCE

SHARI SCHESKE



MAKES ABOUT 30

Biscuit Roses de Reims

THIS COOKIE WAS created in Reims in 1690 when a Champenois baker wanted to take advantage of the heat of his bread oven in between batches. The cookies were originally white, but the vanilla beans used to flavour left them flecked with brown spots so a natural red dye was added to colour them a pretty pink. You can add red food colouring, or not, it won't affect the flavour. It is customary to dip them in champagne before eating.

Eggs 4 large, separated

Vanilla Extract
½ tsp

Sugar 1 cup

Flour 1 ½ cups

Cornstarch
⅓ cup

Baking Soda
1 tsp

Red Food Colouring
1-2 drops (optional)

Confectioner's Sugar for dusting the cookies

Pastry Bag with ¼-inch smooth tip

- 1 PREHEAT** the oven to 300°F. Mix the yolks, sugar and vanilla in a bowl using a hand blender with a whisk attachment, on increasing speeds over a period of 5–6 minutes. Beat in 2 of the egg whites for another 2 minutes. Beat in the remaining 2 egg whites and the food colouring for an additional 2 minutes until the mixture begins to form stiff peaks.
- 2 SIFT** the flour, cornstarch and baking soda into the bowl, folding in gently with a spatula until the batter is smooth and uniform in colour. Scrape it into the pastry bag.
- 3 COVER** a baking sheet with wax paper and grease it with either butter or non-stick spray. Squeeze out strips of the mixture that are ¼-inch wide (about as wide as your finger) and about 3 inches long. Sprinkle with powdered sugar and bake for 15–20 minutes, until a toothpick comes out clean. (You don't want the biscuits to start browning though, or else they won't be pink!)
- 4 TAKE** the biscuits out, sprinkle them with more powdered sugar and place them back in the oven for another 12–15 minutes.
- 5 WHEN** you take them out the final time, quickly cut the edges of the biscuits so that you have even rectangles. Do this before they cool, or else they become difficult to cut. If they cool before you finish, you can place them back in the oven for a few minutes to soften.


«Of 15,000 or so growers, about 4,000 make their own champagne; the rest sell their grapes to the international brands or to cooperatives like Nicolas Feuillatte, the number one champagne merchant in France, with 5,000 member/growers.

The next day we headed to Chalon en Champagne, the capital of the region and a less-visited but beautiful historic town with a renowned cathedral, half-timbered houses, excellent restaurants like The Carillon, and a delightful sound and light riverboat tour through tunnels underneath the city. Its storied Joseph Perrier champagne house, open for tours in summer, has supplied champagne to British royalty for centuries.

After meandering through tiny villages and tasting as much as was sensible, we eventually headed to 17th-century Château de Courcelles to overnight and take advantage of its park-like gardens and exquisite restaurant. The sommelier suggested a bottle of Champagne Geoffrey Rosé Grand Cru — 100 percent pinot noir — so it would pair properly with our fish and meat courses. It drove home the point we'd been learning — that champagne isn't meant just as an aperitif or for a celebratory toast, but pairs beautifully with all kinds of foods, including heavier textures and saltier, spicier flavours.

On our final day in Champagne we decided to let someone else drive, so tour company La Vigne du Roy picked us up at the Hotel de la Paix and took us straight to the flower-filled village of Hautvillers, where Dom Perignon, the 'patron saint' of champagne, is buried. We had customized our tour to include a horse-drawn carriage ride through the vineyards (sipping champagne, of course), a gourmet picnic atop a grapevine-covered hill, and tastings at the small producers our knowledgeable guide Katia wanted to show us, like Nicholas Maillart and Yann Alexander, whose luscious and fine-bubbled champagnes looked like shooting stars in glasses of gold.

Back in Paris for one last night, we headed to the city's very first champagne bar, Le Dokhan, in the Radisson Blu's elegant 18th-century building, with a stellar list of 70-plus champagnes and plenty of choices by the glass. We missed the live jazz by one night, but our tasting of Peters Pierre Rosé for Albane with its long, lingering finish made its own melodic mark.

When the champagne shipment from Dilletantes arrived back at home I eagerly unpacked the bottles and lined them up to have a look. "You're like a kid admiring her Halloween candy," my husband laughed. "Yes," I said, "But enjoying these doesn't have to be a once-a-year treat." 

JERREY W.



SERVES 4

Pasta with Shrimp and Green Beans in a Champagne Beurre Blanc Sauce

Raw Shrimp

1 lb, peeled and deveined

Brut Champagne

1 ½ cups, divided

Olive Oil

¼ cup

Shallots

minced, 6 Tbs, divided

Zest of 1 lemon

Fresh Thyme

minced, ½ tsp

Champagne Vinegar

1 Tbs

Pink Peppercorns

1 ¼ tsp

Green Beans

½ lb, trimmed and halved²

Dry Pasta

300 g

Butter

½ c, cut into pieces and chilled

Heavy Cream

1 Tbs

Fresh Chives

minced, ½ Tbs

Fresh Parsley

minced, ½ Tbs

Salt and Pepper

to taste

Lemon Juice

to finish

¹ Or ½ tsp black peppercorns in a pinch.

² Or cut into thirds if they're large.

- MARINATE** the shrimp in ½ cup champagne, the olive oil, 2 Tbs shallots, the lemon zest and thyme for at least 30 minutes and up to an hour.
- START** the beurre blanc: In a small sauce pan, mix the rest of the champagne and shallots, the champagne vinegar and the peppercorns over medium heat and reduce by a little more than half (15–20 minutes). Set aside, off the heat.
- MEANWHILE**, bring a medium pot of water to the boil and season with salt. Add the green beans and cook for 2–3 minutes until crisp-tender. Remove them and put into ice water.
- WHILE** the green beans are chilling, add the pasta to the boiling water and cook until al dente. Drain.
- PREHEAT** the broiler to high. Set the shrimp on a baking sheet (covered in foil to save cleaning time) and put them under the broiler for about 2 minutes on each side, or until opaque throughout.
- BRING** the beurre blanc back up to medium heat (not quite simmering) and add the butter, one piece at a time, whisking to mix in completely before adding the next piece.
- DRAIN** the green beans and add to the beurre blanc. Season with salt and then add the shrimp and heavy cream. Toss all together, serve over the drained pasta and garnish with the chives, parsley, fresh pepper, salt if needed, and the fresh lemon juice



THIS PHOTO *The Veuve Clicquot vineyards in Verzenay.*

Champagne Heucq Père et Fils

www.champagne-heucq.com

Champagne J. Lassalle

www.champagne-jlassalle.com/en

Château de Courcelles

www.chateau-de-courcelles.fr/en

Dilettantes Maison du Champagne

www.dilettantes.fr

Le Dokhan Champagne Bar

www.radissonblu.com/en/dokhanhotel-paristrocadero/bars

Hostellerie La Briqueterie

www.labriqueterie.fr/en

Hotel de la Paix Best Western

www.bestwestern-lapaix-reims.com/en

Hotel Les Bulles de Paris

www.lesbullesdeparis.com/en

Nicholas Maillart

www.champagne-maillart.fr/en

Mandarin Oriental Bar 8

www.mandarinoriental.com/paris/fine-dining/bar-eight

Joseph Perrier Champagne

www.josephperrier.com/en

Nicholas Feuillatte

www.nicolas-feuillatte.com/en

Hotel Plaza Athénée Le Bar

www.dorchestercollection.com/en/paris/hotel-plaza-athenee/restaurant-bars

Le Vigne du Roy Guided Wine Tours

www.lavigneduroy.com

Yann Alexandre Champagne

www.champagne-alexandre.fr

LAURA SUTHERLAND

is a travel writer based in Northern California.

You can contact her at

LauraSutherland.net and

follow her @WanderandTaste

Visit

FRANCE

Click