

## Agrapart & Fils

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Status: RM

Vineyard area: 9.75 hectares

Production/yr: 90000 bottles

Region: Cote des Blancs

Founded in 1894 by Arthur Agrapart, this outstanding estate in Avize acquired much of its present vineyard land during the 1950s and '60s, thanks to Arthur's grandson Pierre. Since 1984 it has been run by Pascal Agrapart and his brother Fabrice, who have taken the domaine to ever-greater heights, emphasizing natural viticulture and the expression of terroir.

The Agraparts' vineyards are spread over 62 parcels, the majority of which lie in the grand cru villages of Avize, Cramant, Oiry and Oger. Average vine age is about 35 years, with the oldest vines in Avize over 60 years. Pascal Agrapart (pictured) is uninterested in being labeled as either organic or biodynamic, but he does feel that it's important to work according to natural rhythms and sensibilities, and both the vineyard work and the work in the cellar follow this philosophy. No chemical pesticides or weedkillers are ever used, and all of the vineyards are worked manually, encouraging the roots to descend deeper. The Agraparts place great importance on the proper technique and timing of pruning to control vineyard maladies, and some homeopathic treatments are also used in the vines to control parasites.

As expected for a Champagne estate that places a strong emphasis on viticulture, the average potential alcohol at harvest is very high here, normally around 11 degrees, and Agrapart virtually never chaptalizes any of his wines. The grapes are pressed with a traditional Coquard vertical press, and fermentation is carried out with natural yeasts, which Agrapart feels is crucial to the expression of terroir. Malolactic fermentation is completed for all the wines, and a portion of the best wines of the harvest are aged in old, 600-liter demi-muids: "the older the better," says Agrapart, as he hates the flavors of new barrels. The wines are typically bottled around the full moon of May, with no fining, no filtration and no cold stabilization.

Agrapart's wines are of uniformly excellent quality, with a naturally expressive and vinous character that makes them feel grown rather than made. Les 7 Crus is a consistently reliable value, and the other wines in the range offer increasingly more precise demonstrations of Côte des Blancs terroirs. The 2002s represent the finest collection of vintage wines that I have ever tasted at Agrapart, and while they are already sold out at the estate, they are well worth seeking out in the marketplace. Personally, I find Agrapart's wines to be considerably finer and more sophisticated than their labels, which are unfortunately rather garish, but one extra element that I appreciate very much is that all of Agrapart's bottles carry a back label that lists the date of bottling and date of disgorgement.

The Agrapart range begins with a non-vintage blanc de blancs called Les 7 Crus, referring to its origins in the seven villages of Avize, Cramant, Oger, Oiry, Avenay Val d'Or, Bergères-les-Vertus and Mardeuil. It's typically blended from two different years, with half of the older vintage aged in oak barrels, and consistently represents excellent value.

The Terroirs, packaged with a green label, is also blended from two different vintages, with half of the older one aged in wood, but it's made exclusively from grand cru chardonnay, sourced from 20- to 40-year old vines on the mid-slope in Avize, Cramant, Oger and Oiry. In addition, it's aged for one year longer than the 7 Crus, due to the greater depth and richness of the grand cru fruit. The Terroirs is also used as the base wine for the estate's rosé, called Les Demoiselles, where it's blended with pinot noir from Cumières, purchased from René Geoffroy.

Agrapart produces three vintage wines, all of which have remarkably different characters. The first is the Minéral, which always comes from 40-year old chardonnay vines in the same two parcels: Le Champ Bouton in Avize and Bionnes in Cramant. These vineyards are not located too far away from each other, and they share virtually identical soil composition: a hard, white chalk underneath a mere 30 centimeters of topsoil.

## The Wines

Les 7 Crus Brut Blanc de Blancs

Terroirs Brut Blanc de Blancs  
Grand Cru

2002 Mineral Extra Brut Blanc de  
Blancs Grand Cru

2002 L'Avizoise Extra Brut Blanc  
de Blancs Grand Cru

2002 Cuvee Venus Brut Nature  
Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru

Les Demoiselles Brut Rose

Beginning with the 1995 vintage, Agrapart has made a monocru wine called L'Avizoise, sourced from vines up to 50 years old in the vineyards of Les Robarts and La Voie d'Épernay, which lie adjacent to each other on the Avize hillside north of the village itself. The Avizoise is aged entirely in demi-muid, and the fermentation in bottle is carried out under cork rather than capsule, with a minimum of four years on the lees. Like the Minéral, the Avizoise is an Extra Brut, bottled with four to five grams of dosage. It's a wine that expresses a very particular terroir, but as Agrapart points out, "it's only one facet of the terroir of Avize": Avize has two main terroirs, one very chalky and the other a deeper argilo-calcaire, and the parcels used for Avizoise both lie on argilo-calcaire.

In 2000, the Agraparts began working one of their best parcels in Avize by horse instead of tractor. This wasn't for publicity reasons, but rather because plowing by horse doesn't compact the soil as much, keeping it better aerated. Roughly one-third of a hectare of vines in the vineyard of La Fosse, planted in 1959, are worked by their Boulonnais mare named Vénus, who also lends her name to the resulting wine. Like the Avizoise, the Cuvée Vénus is a very terroir-specific wine, but in addition to the difference in the method of plowing, another difference is that this section of La Fosse lies largely on the chalky portion of the slope, contrasting the clay soils of the vineyards used for the Avizoise.

### **Importers**

US: Beaune Imports, Berkeley, CA; Polaner Selections, Mt. Kisco, NY

UK: Simply Champagne, Rawdon, Leeds

## 2002 Cuvee Venus Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru



**Rating: \*\*(\*)**

This is made from a small portion of the vineyard of La Fosse in Avize, worked by horse rather than by tractor. The vineyard of La Fosse is intensely chalky, unlike the clay-based soils of the parcels used for L'Avizoise, and the 2002 Vénus keenly expresses this chalky minerality, feeling crystalline and effortless in its elegance and purity. On the palate it's subtle, silky and detailed, finishing with outstanding length and vivid aroma. It's a brut nature, released without any dosage, and it feels entirely complete and secure without the addition of sugar, its tense, ripe fruit and vinous character giving it an admirable depth and harmony. While it's already expressive now, it still feels like a youthful champagne, and it should provide ample reward with an additional five to ten years of aging.

**Last tasted: 7/08**