



On the way from Aÿ to Dizy, the road winds along the base of the imposing Aÿ slope, upon which lie some of Champagne's most coveted vineyards. At its western edge there is a little copse of trees lying above a curve in the road, just before crossing the invisible border into Dizy, and behind these trees lies the *lieu-dit* of Vauzelle Terme.

Is Aÿ the greatest pinot noir terroir in Champagne? There have been historic arguments for this, but as revered as this village is, we have had comparatively few outstanding examples of pure Aÿ in the modern day. Since 1996, though, Jacquesson has been bottling Vauzelle Terme as a single-vineyard champagne, and the results have been spectacular.

Jacquesson's parcel measures just 30 ares (a little under one-third of a hectare, or three-quarters of an acre), and the pinot noir vines here were planted in 1980. There's a moderate degree of slope here, a little more than in some surrounding *lieux-dits*, which angles the vines towards the sun; at the same time, the soils are heavily calcareous, with alluvium and limestone above the chalky bedrock, giving the wine a characteristic tension and finesse.



*Laurent Chiquet in the vineyard of Vauzelle Terme*

This sector of Aÿ, in fact, has long been regarded for its wines. Aÿ's wine has been coveted since the Middle Ages, and was the preferred drink of personalities such as François I, Henri IV and Pope Leo X; by the seventeenth century, its praises were being sung by the famed epicure St-Evremond. At this time the most renowned wines of the commune were red, yet by the time that the French *négociant* and wine writer André Jullien wrote his groundbreaking book *Topographie de tous les vignobles connus* in 1816, he classified Aÿ as one of the greatest white wine terroirs of Champagne, noting that it produced the finest sparkling wines.

In Jullien's third edition of the book, published in 1832, he delved even further into the terroir of Aÿ (and indeed, of other areas in Champagne), acknowledging not only the wines of the commune but those of individual *lieux-dits* within it. This would be considered a progressive endeavor even today: to read a historical resource like this from 185 years ago is still surprising, and it puts into perspective how little attention has been paid to Champagne's *lieux-dits* in the modern day, up until very recently.

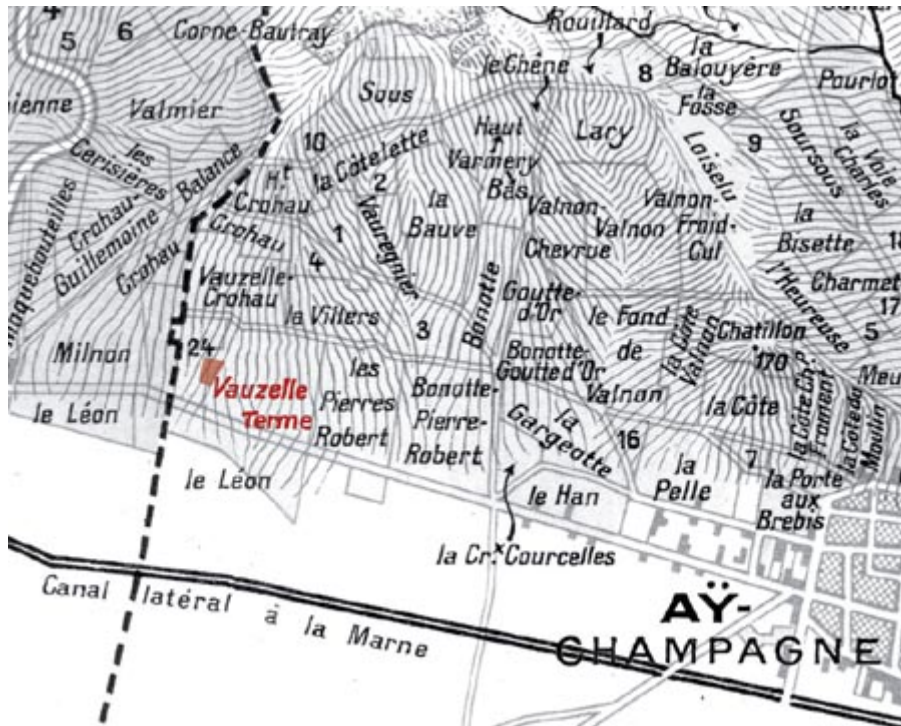
On the subject of Aÿ, Jullien says:

*“Ay et Mareuil-sur-Ay, à 5 l. S. de Reims, et 1/2 l. N.-E. d'Épernay. Ces deux vignobles contigus sont les premiers de ceux dits de la rivière de Marne. Les vins qu'ils fournissent sont assez doux, fins, délicats, parfumés, spiritueux, et plus légers que ceux de Sillery. Lorsque les raisins ont acquis leur parfaite maturité, ils conservent pendant longues années la douceur qui leur est naturelle, sans aucune addition de parties sucrées. On distingue, à Ay, les vignes nommées Charmont, Asniers, les Blancs-Fossés, les Droualles, les Meunières, Cheuselle, les Côtes-Bonnates, la Goutte-d'Or, les Villers, les Vauzelles, le Terme, Pierre-Robert et les Chaudes-Terres.”*

“Ay and Mareuil-sur-Ay, 5 leagues south of Reims and half a league northeast of Épernay. These two contiguous vineyard areas are the finest of those in the area of the Marne River. The wines that they deliver are gentle, fine, delicate, perfumed, spiritous, and lighter than

those of Sillery. When the grapes have reached optimal ripeness, they retain for many years a natural sweetness, without any addition of sugar.”

Here is where it gets interesting, for our purposes. Jullien goes on to say: “We can single out, in Aÿ, the vineyards named Charmont, Asniers, les Blancs-Fossés, les Droualles, les Meunières, Cheuselle, les Côtes-Bonnates, la Goutte-d’Or, les Villers, les Vauzelles, **le Terme**, Pierre-Robert and les Chaudes-Terres.”



Many of these vineyards lie on the prime portions of the main slope of Aÿ close to the village itself, which isn’t surprising, as these are the warmest sites in the commune. What’s striking, though, is that many of these are also the same parcels that we prize today, nearly 200 years later. Chaudes-Terres, for example, is one of the parcels where Bollinger grows ungrafted vines for its Vieilles Vignes Françaises; Cheuzelles is one of the vineyards that Jean-Paul Hébrart of Marc Hébrart uses for his excellent Noces de Craie. Bonnates is likely either a misspelling or an old alternate spelling of Bonnotes: among the various *lieux-dits* on the “Côtes Bonnotes” is Bonnotte-Pierre-Robert (directly adjacent to Pierre-Robert itself), which is one of the two primary vineyards (along with the neighboring Gargeotte) that form the base of Louis Roederer’s Cristal Rosé. Goutte d’Or, among other vineyards in the area, is used for Cristal blanc.

And then there is Terme, or Vauzelle Terme, as it’s now known. Today, Jacquesson’s Vauzelle Terme is one of the greatest expressions of pure Aÿ that there is, along with Jacques Selosse’s La Côte Faron, Philipponnat’s Le Léon and Marc Hébrart’s Noces de Craie (and, arguably, Gaston Chiquet’s Blanc de Blancs d’Aÿ). For Jacquesson, it began as an experiment rather than a fully formed concept. “We decided to bottle a bit of Vauzelle Terme in 1996 because we had been extremely impressed by the still wine,” says proprietor Jean-Hervé Chiquet. “This followed a similar decision taken the year before with Corne Bautray. At that time we had nothing special in mind, just a wish to experiment with various things: the

improvement of our viticultural practices in the '90s was making us rediscover our own terroirs.”

Today, Jacquesson makes between 2,000 and 2,500 bottles of Vauzelle Terme per year, only in the vintages when the quality is up to its standards: the current release, as of this writing, is the 2005, which is the fourth to be commercialized after the 2004, 2002 and 1996.



The Chiquets recently invited me to taste a complete vertical of Vauzelle Terme, including all four versions that have been released to date, as well as a sneak preview of the forthcoming 2008 and 2009. While each of these wines was individually superb, the opportunity to taste them all together provided an enlightening context, further solidifying my conception of the vineyard's character. Each of the wines showed the influence of its vintage, yet they all shared a common identity, expressed as a multifaceted complexity of both aroma and flavor, and of both fruit and minerality. In structure the wines tend to be sleek and elongated, finishing with outstanding length and a pronounced chalkiness, and they are notably silky and refined in texture, even more so than Jacquesson's other single-vineyard wines from Corne Bautray and Champ Caïn.

Over time it's apparent that the Chiquets have learned to adapt to the vineyard as well: while the 1996 is an outstanding wine, the 2002 and 2004 feel more complete in their expression, and although it's still too early to tell, the 2008 and 2009 are potentially the finest examples of the vineyard that we've seen so far. As the Chiquets are highly rigorous in their selection of vintages (after 2009 there is a Vauzelle Terme only in 2013 and 2015), our familiarity with the vineyard grows slowly, but there is little doubt that this is a distinguished site, and the resulting wine truly lives up to its noble pedigree.

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**2009 Jacquesson Aÿ Vauzelle Terme (disgorged à la volée)**

This is explosively aromatic on the nose, even just after being disgorged. It deftly harnesses the warmth of the vintage, feeling vivid and vibrant in depth while remaining taut, refined and subtly nuanced, its flavors anchored by chalky minerality. It promises to be a stunning wine, already showing an uncommon completeness and complexity, and it's a sophisticated expression of this renowned terroir. Rating: \*\*\*

**2008 Jacquesson Aÿ Vauzelle Terme (disgorged à la volée)**

Despite both bottles being disgorged at the same time just before the tasting, this 2008 appears much more backwards and restrained than the 2009, wrapped up in its leesy richness and powerful acidic structure. Its bold, ripe flavors are dark and smoky, showing both concentration and finesse, yet they still feel disjointed and unformed, needing time to assemble themselves. Still, this clearly shows all the grandeur of the site, vintage and producer, and it will undoubtedly be an exciting wine, given enough time. Rating: \*\*\*

**2005 Jacquesson Aÿ Vauzelle Terme (disgorged 26 February 2015, 2.5 g/l dosage)**

While this was one of the great successes in this difficult vintage, it's gone through ups and downs since release, sometimes appearing vivid and pure in its concentration of flavor and sometimes feeling closed and inexpressive. In this tasting, from a bottle disgorged a couple of years ago, its flavors show a curiously umami, tomato-water savoriness that I hadn't noticed in this wine before, although it remains agreeable. It contrasts the ample volume of the vintage with the intrinsic finesse of the site, and it demonstrates great length and depth on the finish, anchored by a saline chalkiness. Rating: \*\*



**2004 Jacquesson Aÿ Vauzelle Terme (disgorged 13 February 2013, 2.5 g/l dosage)**

As the successor to the incredible 2002, this has always faced an uphill battle in terms of recognition. Yet the 2004 has more than held its own, and in fact, every time that I've tasted these two together in the last couple of years, the 2004 has actually appeared to be the more

precise and filigreed, showing a marvelous sophistication and finesse. In this tasting the two are easily of equal quality (that is to say, of the very highest), both expressing the site with a profound clarity. However, they're each also reflective of their vintages, with the 2004 possessing a lithe, graceful structure and elegant, lilting fragrance. While its lively, focused acidity elongates the fruit flavors on the finish, everything about this is constantly referring back to a sense of soil and place, creating a profoundly site-expressive wine. Rating: \*\*\*

**2002 Jacquesson Aÿ Vauzelle Terme (disgorged 9 February 2011, 1.5 g/l dosage)**

This has the deepest color of the flight, probably because it has the most post-disgorgement age of all of these, but also partly because of the vintage, which the Chiquets compare to 1976 for its hot, dry weather. Six years after disgorgement, its aromas are beginning to acquire a waxy, smoky patina, hinting at notes of honeycomb and clotted cream, yet its fruit remains vibrant and incisive as always, still feeling red and fresh. While its broad build and concentrated flavors reflect its vintage, it also demonstrates a remarkable finesse and complexity, unfolding in multifaceted detail on the palate and persisting with outstanding length and nuance. This is an exciting wine, and it promises to develop even more expression with further aging in the cellar. Rating: \*\*\*

**1996 Jacquesson Aÿ Vauzelle Terme (disgorged *à la volée*)**

When Jacquesson first released this in the early 2000s it was nothing short of a revelation, offering a powerful expression of a grand terroir. This bottle was stored on its lees and disgorged for this tasting—it demonstrates both the intense concentration and pronounced acidity of the vintage, yet without dosage (or post-disgorgement aging) it feels a little steely and austere. As with many 1996s, it's simultaneously youthful and developed, showing some burnished, waxy notes of maturity yet also appearing energized by its vibrant structure. While it doesn't have as much finesse or polish as some later vintages do, it still possesses a strongly identifiable character that it shares in common with the other wines in this tasting: a rich and complex depth of fruit, a sleek, sophisticated build, and above all, a subtly nuanced but insistent chalkiness that infuses the whole. I've tasted disgorged versions of this several times before (with a proper dosage, which the wine really needs), but what's instructive is to taste it in context with the rest of the wines in this lineup, which reveals how Jacquesson has refined the cuvée over time. As good as this wine is, the 2002 and 2004 will be even better with equivalent age. Rating: \*\*\*