

# WEINAKADEMIE ÖSTERREICH

*Meunier – as solo artist in Champagne*

By

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Weinakademiker Thesis (D7)

## **ABSTRACT**

### **1. Motivation**

Single varietal Meunier Champagne is gaining popularity among wine connoisseurs and increasingly among wine enthusiasts worldwide. Historically, Meunier was prized for its winter hardiness and fruitiness it brings to blends but being punished and falsely accused for not having as much significant ageing potential as its companions Pinot noir and Chardonnay. Today, the Marne Valley is seeing something like a Meunier renaissance, as growers – following the lead of a previous generation of Meunier champions such as José Michel and René Collard, have redoubled their efforts on this variety. Moreover, the northernmost sub-regions of Champagne, namely Massif de Saint Thierry and Petite Montagne de Reims as well as north-facing vineyards of Left Bank, Vallée de la Marne that have long been not acclaimed, are crafting wines of higher acidity and elevated freshness. Conclusively, such sites can become even more treasured for Meunier.

### **2. Research questions**

The emergence of new single varietal, single terroir, single parcel practices carried out by young winegrowers, following the steps of true pioneers in the world of Meunier in the last 30 years, has completely changed the scenery and positioning of Meunier as grape variety in the realms of Champagne region. Winegrowers have cultivated Meunier and perfected it, exploring its secrets and gradually revealing its potential.

The extensive research and substantial tastings showed Meunier can make very interesting wines, and, while long thought not to age well, can in fact age for years and even decades when placed in the right hands. Therefore, this work aims to compile and analyse, in a systematic way, the information collected during personal communication, interviews with winegrowers and Maison's on the place of Meunier in the Champagne region. Given the extension of the study, this information is presented in consolidated form.

The study poses the following research questions:

*(RQ.1) What is Meunier profile in Massif de Saint Thierry, Petite Montagne de Reims vs. Vallée de la Marne?*

*(RQ.2) What are the differences in Meunier profile specifically in Vallée de la Marne Left Bank (Rive Gauche) vs Right Bank (Rive Droite)?*

*(RQ.3) Aging potential of Meunier Champagne as monocépage?*

*(RQ.4) Role of Meunier as blending component at Grande Marques?*

### **3. Methodology**

The primary sources for this study are personal interviews with winegrowers and Maisons, books, articles and websites of champagne producers in combination with the author's knowledge and experience on the topic of Champagne, extensive champagne tastings and multiple trips to Champagne region. This research follows a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approach to analyze and synthesize the available data and develop an observation model.

### **4. Content**

The main body of this study consists of five main parts.

First, the sections defining Meunier's etymology, its descendancy and ampelography are provided. Historical background as well as genetical heritage of Meunier is being viewed at closely.

Second, the subsequent three sections identify characteristics of sense of place, meaning growing environment of Meunier and sense of winemaking, with aspects related to craftsmanship of winegrowers in three sub-regions of Champagne. Most northerly areas of Champagne region Massif de Saint Thierry and Petite Montagne de Reims, as well as Vallée de la Marne Right and Left Bank.

Third, analysis of the direct impact of Meunier on blended cuvée in portfolio of the Grande Marques Champagnes. The objective of blending grape varieties, years, terroirs has been aimed to graciously equate qualitative and quantitative variabilities of harvest. Meunier emerged as discreet but essential instrumentalist among many players in the landscape of Champagne region.

Fourth, every part will be analysed through the prism of aging potential of Meunier. Consequently, the results are discussed, and the thesis is concluded by displaying the main results, findings and future research.

### **5. Conclusion**

This thesis analyzes Meunier as single varietal Champagne and identifies various factors influencing its aging potential: sense of place, sense of winemaking and craftsmanship. Aging potential is: The capability of Champagne to develop over many decades; as is stated in the Champagne Master Level study Manual: *'Harmony is a key factor in longevity, as is a certain density associated with ripeness, dry extract and concentration.'*<sup>1</sup> The answer to this question depends heavily on the sequence of variables from viticultural practices to options available and choices conducted in the winery paired with the craftsmanship of the winegrower. The observation model shows the selection of rootstock fitting the properties of the soil is imperative. Further the choice of vessel, comparing stainless steel tanks vs oak barrels, can have diverse implications on wine, not necessarily amplifying the chance of age ability. At the same time, to guide the wine destined for longevity, one would prefer to embrace malolactic conversion, whereas on the other side, growers restrain from such practice. To answer whether Meunier single-varietal wine can age: *yes, Meunier single-varietal wines have potential to age, in case the winegrower is determined to craft the wine of longevity.* Meunier confirmed its aging potential through extensive wine tastings.<sup>2</sup> The factors guiding wine's longevity are not limited to the ones discussed in this research. The study is beset with limitations. Additionally, the observation model should be further refined by detailed identification of factors influencing aging potential of Meunier wines.

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<sup>1</sup> See Liem, P., Study Manual Champagne Master – Level (2022) p.120

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix III