

Champagne Lancelot Pienne

Cramant



Julien, Gilles' son, works with him in complete trust to further increase the level of these wines with superb aromatic expressions thanks to a subtle blend of texture and freshness that never hardens the fruit—an essential quality when working with Chardonnay on chalk.

--4 stars, Bettane & Desseuve, 2025 Guide to Wine

I had my second round of wines from Gilles Lancelot in Cramant this spring, with his Champagne Lancelot-Pienne bottlings showing beautifully and very much worthy of inclusion in any listing of great grower Champagne.

--John Gilman, View from the Cellar, April 2021



In 2010 Gilles Lancelot and three friends founded *Les Artisans du Champagne*, a group for exchanging ideas and to host tastings (above all during the region's annual April salons). He had taken the reins from his father at Lancelot-Pienne in 2005 and three years later Michel Bettane, France's top critic, singled Gilles out for his grand cru blanc de blancs. Bettane extolled Gilles' style of capturing the contradictory elements of precision and textured creaminess within a framework of very fine bubbles. Today, Les Artisans is one of Champagne's elite bands, and its sixteen members are a who's who of growers.

In 2017 his son Julien persuaded him to start planting cover crops between the rows of their vines, as well as to implement a rigorous parcel-by-parcel analysis of grape maturities. At the time, Julien was deep in agronomical studies at AgroParisTech and fresh off an internship at Domaine J-L Chave, where he worked with the man in charge of transitioning Chave's vines to biodynamic farming, a subject that fascinated him.

In 2018 Gilles greenlit his son's ambition to squirrel aside a small amount of the harvest from Mont-Aigu, a parcel on a knoll in the southeast sector of Chouilly under the eye of Château de Saran. From that batch they made several hundred bottles and aged it for five years on the lees in bottle (when released in 2024, Bettane rated it 95).

In 2019, coming off his viticulture and enological studies in Montpellier and an internship at Leoville Las Cases, Julien got Gilles to buy the domaine's first barrel: a 600-liter *demi-muid*, made with steam to shape the staves rather than fire, and without any toasting (steam is meant to minimize harsh wood tannins and allow for "cleaner" transfer of oxygen during ferments and élevage). Prior to that, Gilles had worked strictly with steel tanks, and the concept of wood was foreign. So he said okay, but only one as an experiment.

That same year, Julien made red wine—something Gilles had never done—in a 30-liter glass demijohn. Initially, he wanted to do it from Pinot Noir to see if he could give the Burgundians a run for their money, but Gilles, who knew the vines much better, guided him toward *sélection massale* Meunier in Monthelon that Julien’s great-grandfather had planted in 1961 (in a parcel named *Malfois*, which translates literally as *bad time*, although what happened there back in the day remains a mystery). Julien jumped at the chance. Unfortunately, what would become of the wine was never realized: the demijohn accidentally toppled over and shattered on the winery floor, a bad time indeed that disappointed both of them.

In those days, Julien was only helping out (while clearly pursuing his endless curiosity). His day job was with a research and development team at a LVMH Champagne house. Following that, he went to New Zealand for a six-month internship to study micro-ferments and barrel influences. The pandemic hit right after this internship, leaving him stuck in New Zealand, so he traveled the north and south islands for four weeks as seemingly the only tourist in the country during lockdown.

In 2020 he made a second red wine with Gilles that went on to be blended into a rosé as well as bottled as a still red wine (aka, Coteaux Champenois). That year he entered business school, which led to a year-long stint with a well-known Champagne house that promoted ecological concepts and organic viticulture, but he left after seeing that how this house actually operated didn’t match his convictions. Julien had developed deeply held environmental principles, and the experience convinced him that he didn’t want to work for others; he wanted to control his own destiny. And where he might do that, he realized, lay at his fingertips: his family’s domaine.

In 2022 he officially joined Lancelot-Pienne. By then, the rosé cuvée he first made two years earlier proved successful enough to be marketed as *La Dame du Lac*, playing off the King Arthur reference and honoring his mother, Gilles’ wife. He also made an orange Champagne, which on one level is ridiculous because it’s strictly illegal and can’t be commercially sold, but he made a tiny lot just to see what it would be like. Meanwhile, the experiment with the *demi-muid* had impressed Gilles so much that their cellar now had a half a dozen such barrels.

In 2023 father and son embarked on aging the La Dame du Lac and a part of the Marie Lancelot cuvées under cork rather than under the customary crown cap. This is a more expensive method of aging that promotes additional evolution and complexity in the wine. It’s also much more labor intensive: every bottle must be checked at disgorgement for TCA. Gilles likes the idea of cork aging, but, as with the barrel, he wants to start slowly and see how it pans out.

They farm nearly 22 acres of vines, more or less the average that a grower with a small team can handle. Their base is in Cramant, and their 79 parcels spread along the northern sector of the Côte des Blancs, dip into the Côteaux Sud d’Epernay and reach into the Marne Valley. The breakdown is as follows:

- Côte des Blancs: 6 acres of Chardonnay in grand cru Cramant, Chouilly and Avize, plus 0.75 acres in 1er cru Cuis.
- Côteaux Sud d'Epernay, the communes of Monthelon and Mancy: 4.5 acres of Meunier; 4.5 acres of Chardonnay; and 0.5 acres of Pinot Noir.
- Montagne de Reims, commune of Bisseuil: 1 acre of Chardonnay.
- Vallée de la Marne, commune of Boursault: nearly 0.5 acres of Chardonnay; 3 acres of Meunier; and 1.5 acres of Pinot Noir.

The varietal breakdown is 60% Chardonnay, 30% Meunier and 10% Pinot Noir. The oldest vines were planted in 1920 while the average age across the total is around 40. Julien, like Gilles before him, is concise with information pertaining to each cuvée on the back labels. Annual production averages 65,000 bottles or 5,500 cases.

The family comes from a long line of growers. Gilles' great-grandfather cultivated his own grapes in Cramant in the post WWI years while working as Mumm's vineyard manager, a connection that enabled Gilles to buy the old Mumm winery in Cramant early this century (the photo below of Cramant's vines in winter is from their window). His grandfather began domaine-bottling Champagne in the post WWII years. In 1967 his father married Brigitte Pienne from Chouilly and the two domaines merged. Gilles himself officially took the reins of Lancelot-Pienne in 2005 following his enology studies and after working at his father's side since 1995.

<https://www.champagne-lancelot-pienne.fr/>