



**LAURENT CHAMPS**  
*Sparkling Wine Consultant*

Laurent Champs is the owner and Champagne Master of Vilmart & Cie, an independent, estate-based Champagne house located in the village of Rilly in Montagne de Reims. Vilmart has gained cult status among Champagne aficionados, and the house owes part of this success to Champs, who took over for his father, René Champs, in 1990.

Before taking the reins at Vilmart, Champs trained in the vineyards and wineries of several Champagne Houses, including Charles Heidsieck, and in Bordeaux. He received his Viticulture Professional Certificate (1985), Oenology and Viticulture Technical Certificate (1987), and Superior Certificate of Oenology and Viticulture (1989) at the University of Champagne in Avize. He then received a Superior Certificate in Business and Marketing from the Chamber of Commerce in Reims.

Once at the helm at Vilmart, Laurent continued his father's work and introduced the practice of new oak barrel ageing for their top cuvées. In addition, he implemented labor-intensive biodynamic vineyard methods. As a result, Vilmart's primarily Chardonnay Champagnes, like the great Coeur de Cuvée, cultivated the admiring attention of the international wine press, as well as that of the export markets.

Champs' expertise in the vineyards makes him a natural fit for Kluge Estate Winery and Vineyard, one of Virginia's top producers of sparkling wine. At Kluge Estate, where he joined in 2007, Champs works with winemaker Charles Gendrot on pioneering the vineyard's production of SP, a blanc de blancs made in the méthode traditionnelle, as well as SP Rosé. Champs is excited to work with Kluge Estate in creating world-class sparkling wines, and one of his first orders of duty is in the Pinot Noir vineyards – creating the winery's first blanc de noirs.

Champs was drawn to Virginia, and to Kluge Estate especially, because of what he sees as its potential to make outstanding sparkling wines. The unique microclimate at Kluge Estate, located on the southeast slope of Carter's Mountain in the Blue Ridge Mountains range in Albemarle County, fosters ideal conditions for the production of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes. Champs explains, "I make wine first and bubbles second. I like to work with what nature gives me."

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