A passionate and dedicated perfectionist, Cédric Bouchard has only been making wine since 2000, yet his champagnes have already become some of the most sought-after in the region. From his tiny Roses de Jeanne estate, he produces minute quantities of impeccably exquisite wines that are more Burgundian than classically Champenois in sensibility, with a policy of “one variety, one parcel, one harvest”: each wine is made of a single grape variety and grown in a single vineyard, and each wine comes from a single vintage, even if it isn’t stated on the label. In its strict avoidance of blending of any kind, it’s an aesthetic that is essentially antithetical to that of traditional champagne.

Bouchard’s father is also a winegrower, and for the moment, the two share cellar space in the family’s small facilities in the village of Celles-sur-Ource. Their philosophies differ drastically, however, and in 2000, Bouchard père allowed his son to take over the small vineyard of Les Ursules, as an arena in which to experiment with his ideas. Cédric immediately set about enacting the practices that distinguish his estate today: natural viticulture, unusually low yields and minimalist winemaking. His first wine, Les Ursules Blanc de Noirs from the 2000 harvest, was released in May of 2002, under the label Roses de Jeanne, an homage to his Polish grandmother, Janika. Since then, Bouchard has been able to slightly expand his vineyard area, although it remains miniscule. In 2003, he began producing a second wine from the vineyard of Val Vilaine in nearby Polisy, called Inflorescence, intended to be a second and complementary label to Roses de Jeanne. The following year he produced his first vintage-dated wines, expanding the Roses de Jeanne range to include two other single-vineyard champagnes, and adding yet another one in 2005.

Bouchard selects ruthlessly in both the vineyard and the cellar, and ultimately only the highest-quality juice is retained. “If the wine isn’t of top quality, I sell it to the négoce,” he says. “It’s either top-of-the-line or nothing.” Total production now averages around 6,000 bottles of Roses de Jeanne, spread over four different cuvées, while the production of Inflorescence is a little under 9,000 bottles a year. Unlike many new-wave champagne growers, Bouchard doesn’t use any wood for his champagnes, preferring to ferment all of his wines in stainless or enameled steel. “It’s a question of traceability,” he says. “Wood adds something to the wine that wasn’t originally present, and that’s not my goal.” This sensibility corresponds to the rest of the winemaking, which seeks to present the wines in the clearest possible manner: no chaptalization, no fining, no filtering, no cold-stabilization and no dosage. The wines go through a natural malolactic and are racked only once, just before bottling.
Ironically, Bouchard actually doesn’t even drink very much champagne himself. “In fact, I’m not very Champenois,” he says. “The bubbles bother me a little. That’s why with Roses de Jeanne, the bubbles are very fine, as fine as possible. I don’t like it when the bubbles attack your palate too much.” Towards that end, both Roses de Jeanne and Inflorescence have a lower pressure than usual for champagne, at 4.5 atmospheres rather than six, and the second fermentation proceeds very slowly, often taking two full months to complete the prise de mousse. Having established a name for himself with champagne, Bouchard is now turning his attention towards still wines. “In Champagne, champagne works out very well, and nobody bothers to make Coteaux Champenois at the same level,” he says. “I know it’s pretentious, but I’m aiming to make a great Coteaux Champenois, the best that there is.” His first attempt was in 2007, with one barrel of Coteaux Champenois blanc from chardonnay in Le Creux d’Enfer, bottled exclusively in magnum. In 2008, he made his first red wines from Les Ursules and Le Creux d’Enfer, as well as a still pinot noir from Les Ursules vinified en blanc.

While Cédric Bouchard has achieved remarkable fame for his wines, garnering top accolades from the press and creating a near-cult following worldwide, his feet remain firmly planted on the ground. “For me, being a winegrower is about sharing,” he says. “When I make something and see it please people, that is the real pleasure for me—that is the reason why I work”. Unique in his aesthetic of exclusively single-vineyard champagnes, Cédric Bouchard has quickly established himself as one of the brightest rising stars in all of Champagne. These are wines of exceptional vinosity and depth, and they take their time to evolve, developing slowly over several hours after the bottle is opened. Although they are all labeled as brut, the wines don’t receive any dosage, and yet it’s not even a question about whether or not they need it: Bouchard’s wines are among those rare champagnes that feel perfectly, naturally secure in their dryness, and where the thought of dosage seems even bizarre, as if adding it to a red Burgundy. Many of these, especially the Roses de Jeanne champagnes, can benefit from decanting, and in general they will show far better in a tulip glass than in a standard champagne flute.

As Bouchard’s wines all come from individual parcels, they are best discussed in that context. The Inflorescence Blanc de Noirs comes from a south-facing, 1.49-hectare vineyard in the village of Polisy called Val Vilaine, which is owned by Bouchard’s father but worked by Cédric himself. “Honestly, I created Inflorescence because I was a little bored,” says Bouchard. “Since I own so little land, I was only working six months out of the year.” Val Vilaine is entirely pinot noir, planted in 1974, and his intention is to make the Inflorescence a slightly more approachable wine than those from Roses de Jeanne. “It’s more of an apéritif champagne,” he says. “Roses de Jeanne is more minerally and more concentrated. It’s more a wine for the table.” At the same time, he notes that the longer he works the vines in Val Vilaine, the healthier the vineyard becomes.
and the more the wine improves. “I’m actually a little worried about Inflorescence right now,” he says, “because as time goes on, it’s becoming closer and closer in character to Roses de Jeanne. It’s ruining my system of organization.” Because Bouchard doesn’t own the vineyard himself, he sells this wine as a négociant-distributeur (ND) rather than as a récoltant-manipulant, as with Roses de Jeanne. The differences between the two extend to the vineyards as well: all of the vines for Roses de Jeanne are trained in Cordon du Royat for the pinot noir and Chablis for the chardonnay, and harvested at an average of 4,000 kg/ha (26 hl/ha); whereas for Inflorescence the pinot noir is trained in Guyot simple and harvested at about 8,000 kg/ha (50 hl/ha), which is still exceptionally low for Champagne.

**LA PARCELLE**

Being an ND has yielded a secondary benefit, however, in the distribution of a blanc de noirs called La Parcelle. La Parcelle comes from a 0.73-hectare, southwest-facing parcel of pinot noir in the Celles-sur-Ource vineyard of Côte de Bechalin that Bouchard purchased in 2007, from an old friend of the family. Its previous owner made a little wine but never sold it, and Bouchard was so impressed with the viticulture and the winemaking that when he purchased the vineyard, he also bought all of the old stocks of champagne, and is now releasing them under the Inflorescence label, which is permissible through the ND registration. The first two releases, 1999 and 2000, were sold exclusively in Japan, while the 2001 was sold both in Japan and in the United States (but not a single one of the 2,000 bottles was sold in France). Beginning with the 2002, it became available in a few more countries, but the quantities remain very small. The 2004 was the first vintage of La Parcelle that Bouchard made himself, although between 2004 and 2006 he made the wine at the previous owner's facilities; beginning in 2007, the wine was made in Bouchard's own cellars.

**FLINTY MINERALITY**

The original Roses de Jeanne wine is Les Ursules, which is a blanc de noirs from a relatively flat vineyard of the same name, located down the street from Bouchard’s cellars in Celles-sur-Ource. It covers 90.51 ares, with most of the vines planted in 1974, and the average production is about 2,800 bottles a year. Les Ursules is the only Roses de Jeanne wine that doesn’t state the vintage on the label. Nevertheless, as with all of Bouchard’s wines, it always comes from a single vintage, and in fact, since 2005 he has made magnums of this wine for late release, and those are vintage-dated. From the 2010 vintage, which will be released in the fall of 2012, Les Ursules will become a vintage-dated champagne, in both bottle and magnum. As the original manifestation of Bouchard's philosophies, Les Ursules is likely to be the wine most representative of the estate: concentrated and intense in flavor without being weighty, it combines depth, complexity and poise. Its ripe fruit aromas are a testament to Bouchard's viticultural practices, but so is the elegantly smoky, almost flinty minerality that consistently appears in this wine.
In the 2004 vintage, Bouchard bottled two other single-vineyard champagnes for the first time. La Haute-Lembré, an 11.8-are, south-facing parcel of chardonnay in Celles-sur-Ource, yielded only about 600 bottles in its inaugural vintage, which was released in 2008. This is a warm site, its ripeness further amplified by Bouchard’s low yields, and the sleekly powerful flavors of tropical and stone fruits are unlike anything found in the Marne.

Le Creux d’Enfer is a west-facing parcel in which Bouchard owns a mere 7.2 ares—three rows of pinot noir and three of chardonnay, planted in 1994. In the best vintages, the pinot noir is used to make a rosé, which is not pressed but is rather crushed by foot and left to macerate on its skins to derive color. Although it’s a macerated rosé, it’s intended to be a wine of elegance rather than one of power. "I want something fine, delicate, crystalline," says Bouchard. The first vintage of rosé was the 2002, although that one wasn’t vintage-dated; Bouchard made it again in 2004, 2006 and 2007. With its subtle finesse, graceful refinement and kaleidoscopic complexity, this rosé is nothing short of a revelation, and the three vintages that have been released so far—2002, 2004 and 2006—are among the very finest rosés to be found in Champagne today.

Nearly all of Cédric Bouchard’s vineyards are on argilo-calcaire, the clay and chalk mixture typical of this area of the Aube, but he has a sole, 21-are parcel on chalk called La Bolorée, which contains pinot blanc vines planted in 1960. This south-facing vineyard is technically in the neighboring commune of Merrey-sur-Arce, but it lies in the same valley as the vineyards of Celles-sur-Ource, and when Bouchard talks about it, he often refers to it as a Celles-sur-Ource parcel. The highly-anticipated inaugural vintage of this wine, the 2005, was released in the spring of 2009, with fewer than 1,000 bottles made. La Bolorée is an exceptional wine, and highly original as well—it’s extremely rare to find parcels of old-vine pinot blanc in Champagne, and rarer still to find them vinified and bottled separately.

While it’s undoubtedly what’s inside the bottle that counts the most, it’s always pleasing when wine is attractively packaged as well, and Cédric Bouchard’s labels are among the most beautiful in Champagne. My only gripe in the past was the lack of any indication whatsoever on the Inflorescence and Les Ursules as to the year of harvest, making it difficult to know precisely which wine you were drinking. This has now changed, however, as Bouchard has begun including a small code that appears as: Vxx, where xx is the vintage year (V03, for example, indicates 2003). As Bouchard’s wines develop wonderfully over time, this will certainly make them easier to organize and keep track of in the cellar.