

Caroline Latrive and Champagne Ayala

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With an almost 300-year history, Champagne is a wine of tradition and of celebrations. There are more than 100 Champagne houses and more than 15,000 growers in Champagne and each bottle of Champagne tells a story.

Many of the wonderful stories are of the many women who have been an integral part of the history of Champagne. There was Madame Clicquot of Veuve Clicquot who, in the 1700s, is credited with influencing the production and marketing of Champagne.

There was Jeanne-Alexandrine Louise Pommery who took over Champagne Pommery in 1858 after the death of her husband and created a drier style of Champagne with the Pommery Brut Nature.

Marie-Louis Lanson de Nonacourt was also widowed and in 1938 left her family firm Lanson to purchase Laurent Perrier, which was near bankruptcy at the time.

And, in the 1940s, Lily Bollinger took charge after her husband's death and expanded Bollinger's production, focused on Pinot Noir, and launched the prestige cuvee R.D. with the 1952 vintage.

What these women all have in common is that their leadership of a Champagne house was the result of being widowed. However, the Champagne industry has been traditionally run by men. Yet today there are a handful of women who are making their mark on the Champagne industry. One of these women is Caroline Latrive, *chef du cave* (head winemaker) at Champagne Ayala.



Caroline Latrive was born in Reims in 1975. She is Champenoise through and through. Her interest in Champagne began at a young age, when she would visit different producers with her father, an enology consultant. A curious child, she remembers smelling the wines when she was 5 years old. Visits to cellars with her father are vivid pictures in her mind. She particularly remembered tasting a blanc du blancs in magnum at a celebration. She learned about Champagne from her father but becoming a winemaker herself was not an obvious choice.

It was not natural for her father to want her to follow in his footsteps, as he might have a son. But Caroline was confident in what she wanted to do and she received her National Oenology Diploma in 1999.

When she studied enology 20 years ago, there were only five women out of 25 in her class. She stopped working with her father as it was challenging to establish her footing working under him. She found that some doors were closed to her but that is what challenged her and made her stronger.

Latrive took her first job at Bollinger. Caroline then received a master's degree in oenology in wines from Champagne in 2005 and joined Champagne Ayala in 2006. After five years working in the cellar, Latrive was appointed as Cellar Master in 2011, making her one of only a handful of female cellar masters in Champagne.

Based in Ay, in the heart of the great champagne vineyards, Champagne Ayala was founded in 1860 by Edmund de Ayala. Champagne Ayala was one of the 18 founding members in 1882 of the "Grandes Marques de Champagne" syndicate.

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Champagne Ayala was one of the largest houses in Champagne, producing more than a

million bottles each year. In 1908, Edward VII gave Ayala a Royal Warrant at his coronation, and Champagne AYALA was an official supplier to the royal courts of England. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Champagne Ayala was the “belle of the ball” in Bohemian Paris and London.

After World War II, Champagne Ayala went through a quiet period until the Bollinger family bought the estate in 2005. Champagne Ayala was completely restored, and today remains an independent, family-owned Champagne house.

Champagne Ayala is known for its fresh and elegant wines. Ayala first introduced a drier style of Champagne. In the 19th century, the British and Russians drank Champagne that had lots of sugar in it. The British enjoyed it with 100 grams of sugar, while the Russians liked their Champagne with 300 grams of sugar. In 1865, Champagne Ayala presented to Edward VII and the English Court the first low dosage Champagne, with only 22 grams of sugar.

In addition to low dosage, Chardonnay plays a dominant role in Champagne Ayala wines. The wines are all exclusively fermented in stainless steel and undergo malolactic fermentation. Champagne Ayala are wines of purity, freshness, and elegance and it is Cellar Master Caroline Latrive’s job to maintain the house style.

Champagne Ayala owns 20 hectares of vineyards and works with 100 different family vineyards. Latrive does lot-by-lot vinifications in small thermo-regulated stainless-steel vats. Ultimately, she has more than 120 different tanks to work with, resulting in a large palate of aromatics to make her final blends for different cuvees.



Ayala Brut Majeur NV (\$55)

The flagship of Ayala, Brut Majeur expresses the freshness, purity, elegance of Champagne Ayala. A blend of 40 percent Chardonnay, 40 percent Pinot Noir, and 20 percent Pinot Meunier, Latrive tastes through each of the 120 vats to make the final blend.

She explained, “For me, it is an incredible exercise of blending each year to maintain this level of quality and expression.” For this current release of Brut Majeur, there are 66 different crus in the blend with a base from the 2015 vintage, and 25-30 percent reserve wine to add complexity. The wine spends three years on the lees and three months in the bottle after disgorgement. The dosage is 7 grams per liter. The

wine is lively and precise with aromas of lemon, green apple, white flowers, melon, as well as toasty and mineral notes.

Caroline Latrive's recommended pairing: Enjoy as an aperitif, or pair with fish or foie gras.

Ayala Rosé Majeur NV (\$72)

A blend of 50 percent Chardonnay, 40 percent Pinot Noir, and 10 percent Pinot Meunier, it is rare to have a rosé made predominately from Chardonnay. The color comes from the six percent of Pinot Noir from Aÿ that is blended in. The wine spends three years on the lees and the dosage is only 7 grams of sugar per liter. Elegant with juicy acidity, this wine has an inviting nose of fresh strawberry and cherry, grapefruit, and roses. Fresh acidity leads to a creamy, chalky finish.

Caroline Latrive's recommended pairing: Serve with salmon, duck, lamb or a strawberry or lemon tart.

Ayala Brut Nature (\$63)

This no dosage wine pays homage to Ayala's low dosage wine of 1865. A blend of 40 percent Chardonnay, 40 percent Pinot Noir, and 20 percent Pinot Meunier, the wine spends four years on the lees. Latrive described it, "a wine with no makeup." The wine is pure and elegant but complex with grapefruit, white fruit and mineral notes.

Caroline Latrive's recommended pairing: Enjoy with oysters, sushi, sashimi, and caviar or Thai cuisine.

Ayala Le Blanc de Blancs 2013 (\$110)

More than a vintage wine, this is a pure expression of Chardonnay. Latrive wants to "express the style and expressivity of this cuvee" and blends the best Chardonnay from three Grand Cru and two Premier

Cru villages on the Côte des Blancs. The wine is aged on the lees for six years to obtain the opulence and generosity of the Chardonnay. With notes of white flower, citrus and minerality, as well as depth and texture, to Latrive, “this is the best expression of Chardonnay for me.”

Caroline Latrive’s recommended pairing: Pair with scallops with salt and butter.

Ayala Perle d’Ayala 2006 (\$175)

An exquisite prestige cuvée, the wine is 80 percent Chardonnay and 20 percent Pinot Noir exclusively from Grand Cru villages. The wine rests for nine years after disgorgement under cork to allow for controlled micro-oxidation. The wine is riddled by hand and the dosage is only six grams per liter. It is a gorgeous wine with stone fruit, citrus, nutty, and toasty notes. The wine is rich and decadent, yet tense and structured.

Caroline Latrive’s recommended pairing: Enjoy with rich dishes such as foie gras or braised sweetbreads.

Champagne Ayala is the place where Caroline Latrive can express herself and for more than a decade, she has perpetuated Champagne Ayala’s style of freshness, elegance, and purity. Today she has a team that she works with who share the same vision.

According to the BBC, 60 percent of enology students in Champagne today are women. Caroline Latrive is an example for them all. And ultimately, she said, “It is not a question of gender but one of passion and tenacity.”