

Writes: Steven Schaefer

Photography: Nicolas Maillart Champagnes

# Precision Without Pretension

## Nicolas Maillart Champagnes

There's no brass plaque outside. No glossy showroom. At Nicolas Maillart's estate in Écueil, you step into a working winery, not a brand experience. A few opened bottles rest casually on a side table — from other producers, too. It tells you something immediately: this is a place where champagne is made, tasted, judged, and talked about. Not performed.

Maillart doesn't offer a rehearsed narrative. He speaks with ease, like someone who trusts his work to do most of the explaining. We tasted in a practical, lived-in room. You got the sense he'd just stepped away from blending tanks, not a marketing meeting.



*Maillart cultivates a rare parcel of ungrafted vines — a quiet rebellion against uniformity, and a nod to Champagne's pre-phylloxera identity. The vines are fragile, but the wines they yield are not.*



"I follow biodynamics when I can," he told us, "but if something threatens the whole harvest, I'll use what's needed." There was no pride in the statement, and no apology either. It's pragmatic viticulture — clean farming grounded in outcomes, not ideology.

The estate is compact but multifaceted, stretching across Écueil, Villers-Allerand, and Bouzy. Each plot contributes something distinct — chalk, clay, slope, or sun. Pinot Noir dominates, but Maillart also works with Chardonnay and even Petit Meslier, a rare varietal kept for its freshness and subtle bitterness.

Vinification is minimalist but methodical. Gravity handles most of the movement; solar panels handle much of the power. Barrels are used judiciously to bring oxygen and texture, not flavor. Reserve wines are added where needed — and never to compensate for character.



One of the few producers in Champagne to still work with Petit Meslier — a near-extinct varietal prized for acidity and a subtle bitter lift. It's a whisper in the blend, but it shapes the finish.



*The estate's energy efficiency is fully integrated — solar panels on the roof, and gravity handling juice flow from press to tank. Not a concept, but a system, reducing intervention from start to finish.*





Massal selection is standard here. Instead of replanting with clones, old vines are propagated from their best peers — carrying flavor memory and local adaptation from one generation to the next.



*Maillart practices parcel vinification with surgical precision. Every plot is pressed, vinified, and aged separately — preserving micro-identity until blending, or not blending, becomes a choice.*



There's also a quiet commitment to genetic legacy. Maillart works with massal selections and even a few ungrafted vines — a risky but rewarding homage to pre-phylloxera viticulture. It's not for storytelling. It's because the difference matters in the glass.

No house style is imposed on the wines. The blended cuvées are meant to show balance and structure. The single-parcel bottlings are left to express contrast — texture, slope, precision. Every wine has its own tempo.

Nothing during the visit was polished for effect. The place feels used, lived-in, and entirely sincere. It doesn't try to sell you on the romance of winemaking. It simply lets you stand close enough to notice it.

*Some barrels in the cellar have been in rotation for decades. They're not there to mark the wine, but to breathe with it — gently oxygenating base wines for volume and calm, not flavor or flair.*



#### TASTING NOTES

**Platine Premier Cru:** Clean and structured with orchard fruit, light chalk, and a whisper of toast. A precise, balanced entry point with impressive persistence.

**Montchenot Premier Cru:** Shows soft spice, crushed red berries, and a broader mid-palate. A rounder expression, framed by quiet acidity and fine tannin.

**Les Loges Premier Cru:** Linear and high-toned. White citrus, saline tension, and razor-sharp minerality — this is a single plot speaking in full sentences.

**Ronsures Pinot Noir Grand Cru:** Compact and driven, with red fruit, herbal nuance, and an iron-rich structure. Tightly coiled now, meant to stretch over time.

**Jolivettes Grand Cru:** Generous and smoky, with depth from old vines and Bouzy clay. Layered with toast, peach skin, and a mineral finish that lifts the weight.

