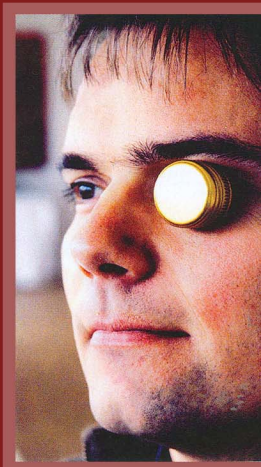


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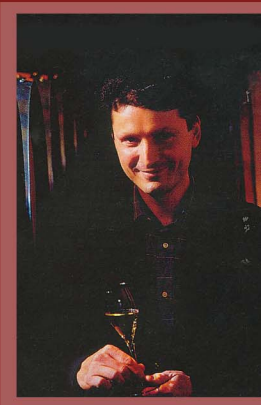
Johannes Hirsch **SCREW-CAP VISIONARY**

Johannes Hirsch, 34, recently made the brave decision to bottle all Hirsch wines with screw caps, from the less-than-\$20 "Veltliner #1" to the spicy, racy \$45 Zöbinger Heiligenstein Riesling. It's a stand for quality—no more cork-tainted bottles—like his decision to hold his wines until maturity, often in September, rather than send them out for an easy sale during Austria's spring wine-release hoopla. Hirsch is a serious winemaker, but he isn't humorless—witness his screw-cap monocle at right.



Laurent Champs **CHAMPAGNE MASTER**

The small estate-based Champagne house of Vilmart was founded in 1890, but only when Laurent Champs took over in 1997 at age 28 did its wines become shockingly good. Champs began fermenting and aging portions of the wine in new oak barrels; he also implemented labor-intensive biodynamic vineyard methods. As a result, Vilmart's primarily Chardonnay Champagnes, like the great Coeur de Cuvée, have a shimmering, silky smokiness that's unmistakable.



Philipp Wittman **VOICE OF THE RHEINHESSEN**

Philipp Wittmann wins the German wine trifecta: The 31-year-old fashions delicious dry Riesling and dessert wines from a family estate that dates back to 1663; he's championed obscure grapes such as Albalonga, using it to make a sensuous, luxury-priced dessert wine; and he's been instrumental in bringing the country's Rheinhessen region to international prominence with such Rieslings as his sleek, racy Westhofener Morstein Spätlese.

