

THE
WORLD'S
MOST ADMIRED
CHAMPAGNE
BRANDS 2023

DRINKS
INTERNATIONAL

1 LOUIS ROEDERER

LOUIS-ROEDERER.COM

When the Most Admired Champagne Brands concept was first devised 10 years ago, it looked very unlikely that one single marque would become as dominant a player as Louis Roederer has. The top 10 brands have not changed much in that decade, certainly not in the past five years, but you could previously envisage any one of this group getting the most votes and topping the table in any given year.

However, Roederer has won the past four surveys on the trot and has topped the table in five of the past six years. It has not been out of the top three over the past eight years and fifth, its position in 2015 when I took over producing this supplement, is the worst it has done.

Key to Roederer's success is teamwork, and at its heart is the working relationship between head winemaker Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon and chief executive Frédéric Rouzaud. They have worked together for just over 16 years, since Rouzaud took over from his father, Jean-Claude, as head of this famous house. Lécaillon preceded him by 17 years, arriving in August 1989.

It's no exaggeration to say that Roederer, under their combined stewardship, has been at the forefront of addressing the many issues thrown up by the challenge of adapting to climate change.

They have examined and altered almost every aspect of their approach over the past two decades. That shows great courage from Rouzaud, who has been so open to change, including the radical decision to convert the considerable



vineyard holdings to organic or biodynamic production methods.

Constant striving for improvement means that at Roederer there is always something to report on. As Lécaillon acknowledged at his presentation in London in late November, he likes to have something new planned to form the future basis of such masterclasses.

At this most recent event we looked at re-releases of longer-aged Brut vintage cuvées, five wines that he made from 1990 to 1999. We were told that similar examinations of vintage Rosé and vintage Blanc de Blancs are already planned for two and four years ahead, respectively.

This presentation – dazzling wines of ethereal quality with '95 and '99 my favourites – revolved around the long post-disgorgement ageing on the cork of these vintage champagnes, all shown in their original disgorgements. Even though he had only just started working there, it was Lécaillon himself who had the foresight

to put these wines away. “They didn’t keep any stock of vintage releases when I started so I put some vintages aside to showcase their ageability.”

As Lécaillon said at the outset: “This is not a vinotèque collection, nor a limited edition, nothing new in fact, just a deep dive into our DNA.” However, as everyone in the group that attended would almost certainly agree, such tastings are among the most exciting and informative on offer from Champagne.

Writing each year a detailed report on the previous harvest to include in this supplement, it is always tempting to use large chunks of what Lécaillon has to say (in his detailed summary of the growing season). This is because it is always apposite, accurate, articulate, and full of insights, and shows the lengths to which some producers will go to protect their crops and advance the quality.

This past harvest year [2022] there were yet more weather extremes. Lécaillon noted in his



QUALITY FIRST,
NOT QUANTITY,
IS FOREMOST IN
THE ROEDERER
MINDSET

report: “In late June, we were still worried about scalding or ‘sunburn’ on the bunches because the foliage was not as thick as usual due to the low rainfall, so we sprayed the vines with some kaolin-based sun protection.” Now that’s attention to detail.

In the end, he noted: “There was very little scalding. It seems that the rainfall in June and on 20 July was effective in reducing any scalding and water stress.”

Given the paucity of the volume produced in the 2020 and 2021 harvest it is also interesting to note that Roederer embarked on some “green harvesting” in the “few plots dedicated to producing rosé and Côteaux Champenois wines [red and white]”.

Lécaillon said: “This is a very rare operation because it is only carried out in ‘generous’ years and allows us to regulate the grape load to attain an extra degree of ripeness with concentrated juices and high-quality tannins.”

Again, attention to detail. Quality first not quantity – even when the reserve stock is on the low side – is foremost in the Roederer mindset. For anyone who thought that the launch of the new style Collection 242 Brut sans année at Roederer in 2021 was going to be its last innovation for a while, think on. Roederer stays ahead of the competition by constantly reinventing itself.