

Louis Roederer at 250: How Champagne's Most Admired Brand Stays Ahead

As Louis Roederer celebrates its 250th anniversary, Alice Lascelles explores the history and innovation behind its enduring success.

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Every year, one of the wine magazines publishes a league of ‘Most Admired Champagne Brands,’ based on a poll of several hundred buyers, merchants, masters of wine, sommeliers, and drinks writers (including me). For the last seven years, the top spot has been taken by Louis Roederer – the family-owned champagne house which also makes Cristal.

It wins praise for the “quality and consistency of its wines,” its “attention to detail,” and its “constant innovation,” says champagne writer Giles Fallowfield, who organizes the poll. There is also, he adds, simply “a certain class about everything it does.”

Roederer’s pulling power was certainly plain at its 250th anniversary last week, which took place in Reims amidst – or, rather, in spite of – record-breaking heat. The invite-only bash for 600 began with an artistic performance at the city’s Centre de Congrès, followed

by an al fresco party in the cobbled courtyard of Roederer HQ. Michelin-starred canapes with names such as ‘Lobster Zephyr’ and ‘The Hour of the Cuttlefish’ were accompanied by a vertical of Cristal vintages that began with 2018, and culminated in Cristal Late Release 2008 in magnum – a dazzling wine, from a vaunted year, that had even the most jaded industry types squealing with excitement.

“A Cristal that has almost 20 years on it, like 2008, is always an extra experience, always,” says Louis Roederer’s remarkably fresh-looking CEO Frédéric Rouzaud, when we meet the next day. “When Cristal is young, it’s very nice, it has finesse, delicacy, concentration, energy, but as it gets older it opens up into a more 3D expression, it’s much more complete.”



It's 150 years since Cristal was first created for Russian tsar Alexander II, after the champagne-loving monarch commissioned a personal cuvée from Roederer's best plots. The original recipe was very sweet – as was the fashion at the time – and came in a bottle made of newly-fashionable lead crystal, hence the name (clear glass is not so great for wine, however, as it exposes it to light damage, or “light strike,” which is why Cristal comes wrapped in a protective layer of golden cellophane these days). The tsar was also paranoid that his enemies might conceal explosives in the punt, so Roederer obliged by designing a bottle with a flat bottom to rule this out.

Cristal may taste rather different today, but it's still made exclusively from Roederer's top grand cru vineyards, to a ratio of around 40 percent chardonnay to 60 percent pinot noir (in the case of the blanc) with six years on the lees. The resulting wine can be quite fine and racy, even airy, at first, but gradually develops a fabulous silkiness and patinated richness with time. Long-aged Cristals in large formats – which create a higher wine-to-oxygen ratio, thus promoting more stately maturation – are even better.

Every cuvée in the Roederer range from vintage Roederer upwards is made entirely from estate-grown grapes – which is highly unusual, unique even, in a house of this size. The preponderance of vineyards on chalky sites is also key to preserving its signature saline, mineral style, especially in hotter, drier vintages, which have been becoming increasingly common in the last 10 to 15 years as a result of climate change.

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“My father's challenge was achieving maturity in the vineyards, which wasn't happening every year. Whereas today my challenge is to preserve freshness,” says Rouzaud. “So a vintage like 2008 [which, unusually, boasts both generous ripeness and bright acidity] is really special.”

Also crucial to Roederer's success is its highly-regarded cellar master Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon. In situ since 1999, Lécaillon has made the company a standard-bearer for sustainable viticulture at scale, with a large proportion of its vineyards now certified organic and/or farmed according to biodynamic practices. He's also extremely erudite on the art of winemaking – if you get the chance to taste with this man, don't miss it.

In 2021, Lécaillon replaced Roederer's entry-level Brut Premier with the more nuanced Louis Roederer Collection, a multi-vintage blend which is re-fashioned for every edition in response to the year it's founded on. In Reims last week I tasted both Collection 244 and the new 247. The former, based on the 2019 vintage, another heatwave, combines luscious orchard fruit and blossom honey notes with a cool, wet chalkiness; the latter, based

on 2022, had more citrusy definition, and a fine, slightly bitter lift. Roederer also makes a lesser-spotted Coteaux Champenois, or still red wine, called Hommage à Camille, which is always interesting to taste.

Roederer may be the toast of the town, but there's no denying it's lacklustre times for champagne more generally – in 2025, shipments fell 2 percent to 266m bottles, or their lowest level for 20 years (the only exception to this being an anomalous dip caused by the first lockdown in 2020), thanks in no small part to waning consumption on Champagne's home turf.

But the US and UK remain “big markets” for Roederer, says Rouzaud. “And Asia, with Japan first – it's becoming our second-biggest market. Australia is also doing well. The Danish are big, big collectors. Eastern Europe is now starting. And in the end, we have only 270m bottles for the whole world.”

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And he remains bullish about Champagne's prospects. “The wine has never been as good as it is today thanks to global warming and to the evolution of the viticulture we practise. Twenty years ago, it was all bodybuilding red wines that were strong and oaky – but now people are wanting wines that are about balance and freshness. They want wines that are easy to drink. And Champagne is so versatile – it makes a beautiful aperitif, a great gift, and vintage especially pairs wonderfully with food,” he adds, recalling an “incredible” pairing of wagyu beef and Cristal rosé he recently had in Japan.



The next big project on the horizon for Roederer is the renovation of its “hotel particulier” – a 10-bedroom mansion, with a beautiful garden, in the centre of Reims. Built in the 19th century, this handsome, high-ceilinged home was the site of many Roederer family parties back in the day. In 18 months’ time, it will re-launch as a property for private hire. Given that Champagne Roederer is not generally open to the public, this is one five-star way to get behind the scenes. “Guests will be able to have a vineyard visit, a tasting, dinner, stay the night – the full 360 degree experience.”

Similar hospitality projects are a-foot at two other Roederer estates: the Bordeaux second growth Château Pichon Comtesse and Maison Delas Frères in the Rhone. In 2018, the company also acquired the historic Hotel Christiana in Val d’Isère, and will re-launch this as a luxury boutique hotel in 2027.

There’s also the Louis Roederer Foundation, which supports the arts. Works commissioned for the 250th anniversary include a piece by the artist and filmmaker Lee Shulman, best-known for his collaborations with Martin Parr; and an installation for Roederer’s hotel particulier by multi-disciplinary artist Bianca Bondi.

“I like what the artist can tell; I like their sensibility, they are predictors, and sometimes they are right. I think we need artists because they alert us sometimes to what is going on,” says Rouzaud.

“In the end, wine is all about *art de vivre*. It is culture.”