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## Louis Roederer New Releases and 2016 Cristal

Champagne Louis Roederer's new releases, including Collection 245, 2017 Rosé, 2016 Vintage Brut, and 2016 Cristal, are set to hit retailers around the world soon. Earlier this month, I tasted the wines and asked Chef de Cave Jean-Baptiste Lecaillon a few questions about his take on these releases and the 2016 vintage.

### Sweet 16

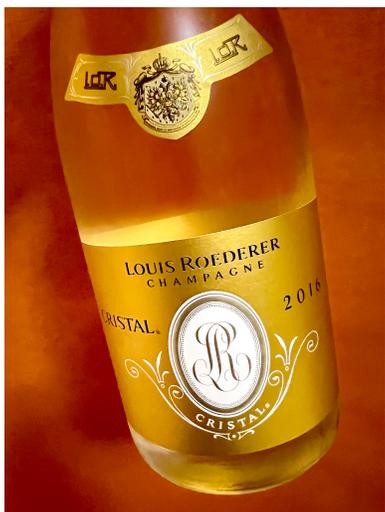
"2016 was a difficult vintage," commented Jean-Baptiste Lecaillon. "We had a wet and complicated spring with frost and high mildew pressure. Yields were, therefore, about average and sometimes on the low side. Summer was good, not hot, except for a heat wave at the end of August that did very well for the Pinot Noir, giving the berries intensity and flesh. I would say 2016 is between 2012 and 2013 in terms of style."

And how does it compare to 2015?

"2016 was very different from 2015, which was hot and dry," said Jean-Baptiste. "The 2015s are big, somewhat austere wines that require aging to become refined, unlike the wines of 2016, which are more balanced, less powerful but fresher, brighter, and more intense. What I love about the 2016 wines is the long salivating, saline finish: they start fruity and ripe but finish fresh and with a chalky focus."

It was intriguing to compare the 2016 Vintage Brut and 2016 Cristal side-by-side, as they express very different faces and phases of the vintage and the Louis Roederer style. The 2016 Vintage Brut is an aromatically showy wine with a gregarious personality that immediately pulls you in. The 2016 Cristal, on first taste, requires a lot of focus to recognize its many layers. Returning to it one and two days later, it reveals a gorgeous floral perfume emerging from the classic red berry and citrus flavors, and the finish is indeed chalky.

**"I would classify the 2016 vintage along with the top vintages of the last 20 years, including 2002, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2013," said Jean-Baptiste. "What is strange, though, is that spring being so difficult for growers and coming after the big 2015 vintage, it was relatively underrated at first. But today, most chefs de caves are impressed by 2016."**



I can see what he means—the 2016 Cristal is very restrained at this stage, such that you could easily miss all the minute nuances poised to emerge with time in bottle. While it's certainly not disappointing to drink now, I recommend not touching this 2016 for at least three to five years.

"The Louis Roederer style is all about effortless finesse," said Jean-Baptiste. "I always compare our style to a great ballerina: effortlessly graceful on stage, but behind this graceful movement there is an exceptional athlete that is the terroir: soil, density, texture, chalky dimension, saline complexity rather than yeasty, smoky, large, lactic."

**"Another dimension of the Roederer style is the ability to age gracefully as well. We craft our wines for the long haul!"**

**I was also impressed with Roederer's specialty multi-vintage house blend—the annual Collection creation. This year's Collection 245 is a finely woven, mineral-laced beauty.**

"Straight NVs are built on the concept of consistent taste," Jean-Baptiste pointed out. "No matter the base wines, they taste the same. Our Collection is a different idea: although it is definitely Roederer, each year, we want to craft the best blend showing the DNA of the base year, which makes every blend of Collection different and more terroir-driven. In one sentence: Collection is halfway between the non-vintage and vintage categories. It expresses the vintage while having the support, the lightness, the complexity, and the drinkability of a non-vintage. This new concept of Collection came with the impact of climate change, giving us riper, lower acid fruit, which is more like vintage wine material. As I explained upon the release of the first Collection, it is a vintage-driven wine with a lighter texture and more complex aromatics. It delivers at an earlier stage, thanks to older wines, particularly our Reserve Perpétuelle, which accounts for 1/3 of the blend, bringing a characteristic reductive freshness."

The Collection 245 has a 2020 vintage base.

"2020 was a ripe and sunny year with lots of concentration," said Jean-Baptiste. "We wanted to capture that juicy ripeness with crunchy fruit and touch of tannins. You can feel the generosity of the sunshine in a light and more reductive way. This is deliciously textured and delicate at the same time. I could say it's in between 244 (chalkiest and more powerful) and 243 (softer and fruitier)."



- Jean-Baptiste Lecaillon