

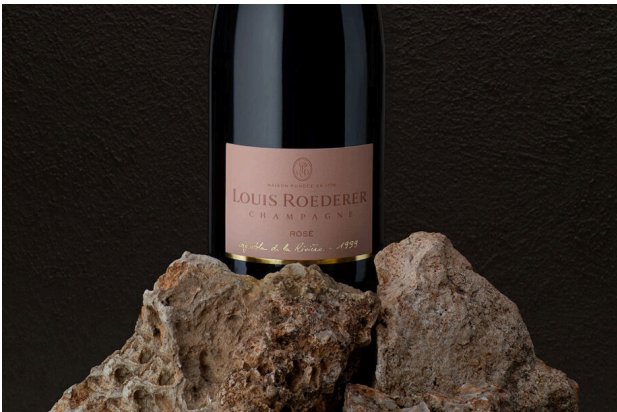
PREMIUM

Roederer: A lifetime of rosé Champagne

A flurry of Louis Roederer rosé tastings has revealed excellence to the highest degree. Tom Hewson reviews the ‘underestimated’ 2016 vintage of Cristal, a vertical of late-release vintage rosés, and an enviable Cristal Rosé vertical from 1976–2013.



Tom Hewson
November 20, 2024



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Credit: Louis Roederer



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New release: Cristal 2016

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Cristal is produced entirely from Louis Roederer's biodynamically-farmed Cristal estate of 45 parcels, spread across the chalky grand cru and premier cru villages of the **Côte des Blancs** and **Montagne de Reims**.

The 2016 features a little more **Chardonnay** than usual thanks to the 'saline, very salivating nature of the vintage – we wanted to push this identity,' explains Lécaillon.

'There was a heatwave in August which really made the **Pinot Noir** texture very charming,' he adds, pointing to the intriguing combination of 'velvety' ripeness, striking inner tension and length.

After the broad-shouldered 2015 and forward 2014 vintages, 2016 represents a return to classicism – and perhaps typicity – for Cristal.

While other 2016s released to date reflect the warmer elements of the year, Cristal 2016 has a core of buzzing, elongating energy that shows the work done in the vineyard to harness the freshness of the chalky soils.

Lécaillon believes that the changing climate can deliver Pinot Noir that is, 'more juicy, textured and concentrated – but, thanks to our viticulture, we are still very low pH, and we are not losing the feeling of freshness'.

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Late Release Vintage Rosé

This autumn, the spotlight is also on Roederer's Vintage Rosé, with consecutive vintages of 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 re-released together after extended ageing.

‘The culture of Champagne is to come back to gastronomy. What can we do to make our wines more gastronomic?’ says Lécaillon. ‘I’m looking for umami flavours. Here we keep them on lees for 10 years (instead of five) and then another 10 years after disgorgement.

‘The lees ageing gives more texture and the post-disgorgement ageing means more oxygen impact and CO2 release, creating a creamier texture,’ he says.

Lécaillon describes the 1999 vintage as ‘generously balanced,’ the 1998 as notable for its ‘tannic structure’ and the 1997 for ‘acid and iodine’. Of the 1996, he is speechless; ‘96 – I cannot find the words!’ He describes the 1995 as ‘perfection’.

Tasted together, these five wines illustrate that extended ageing can elevate fine vintage rosé, producing wines of dynamic, layered depth and complexity.

Cristal Rosé: Back in time 1976–2013

As the rare and highly sought-after Cristal Rosé reaches its 50th anniversary, a remarkable, once-in-a-lifetime retrospective was presented in September this year, with vintages back to 1976.

This was a look at what it has taken, not only in Lécaillon’s tenure but in that of his predecessor, to conceive and then perfect a wine that today hails from just three parcels in Aÿ, Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Avize.

Lécaillon describes the aesthetic as ‘effortlessly perfect’.

The wines, not least the 2013 and 1989 vintages, come as close as it may be possible to get to perfection.

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Having rested in Louis
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