

WINE ENTHUSIAST

Why Grower Champagne Should Be on Your Radar

Of all the wine classes I teach, **Champagne** remains my favorite subject. Students engage, eager to learn; the class feels like a casual conversation about artisans who inspire me.

My presentation always includes a wine flight showcasing the differences between the two main types of Champagne producers one would likely find at their local wine shop: The large well-known maisons, or **Grandes Marques**, and grower producers.

The Grandes Marques serve as the calling card of this illustrious place—carrying on a 350-year-old tradition that makes this region unparalleled. Stroll down the Avenue de Champagne in Epernay, once called Fabour de la Folie (“crazy suburb”), and you will find the famous names of **Moët & Chandon**, **Pol Roger**, **Boizel** and **Vranken**, just to name a few.

These and the likes of **Charles Heidsieck**, **Bollinger** and **Billecart-Salmon** remain steadfast in their house styles. By design, these nonvintage sparklers show minimal variation and are only sustained by the management of long-term relationships with multiple growers. These growers account for at least 50–90% of their total production.

That production focuses on the intricate blending of vin clairs (still wines) from varying years to strike a perfect balance between youthful fruitiness and freshness and aged reserve wines, before adding the liqueur de tirage to start the **secondary bottle fermentation** process that Champagne made famous. The incorporation of reserve wines at this stage infuses layers of depth and complexity.

These reliable styles inspire fierce loyalty among fans. But perhaps even more captivating is the limited production and fleeting nature of vintage Champagne. This is where we may see deviation from the flagship styles and encounter one that begs for pause and discovery in the glass. In creating this rarity, producers seek to celebrate the uniqueness of the vintage.

Wine Enthusiast’s Top-Rated Vintage Champagne

Bollinger R.D. Brut 2007



98 Points

R.D., or Recently Disgorged, is a Bollinger hallmark. This wine stayed on its lees for many years before release, giving it intensity, maturity and great depth. The wine is powerful, concentrated and elegant. Drink now. —R.V.