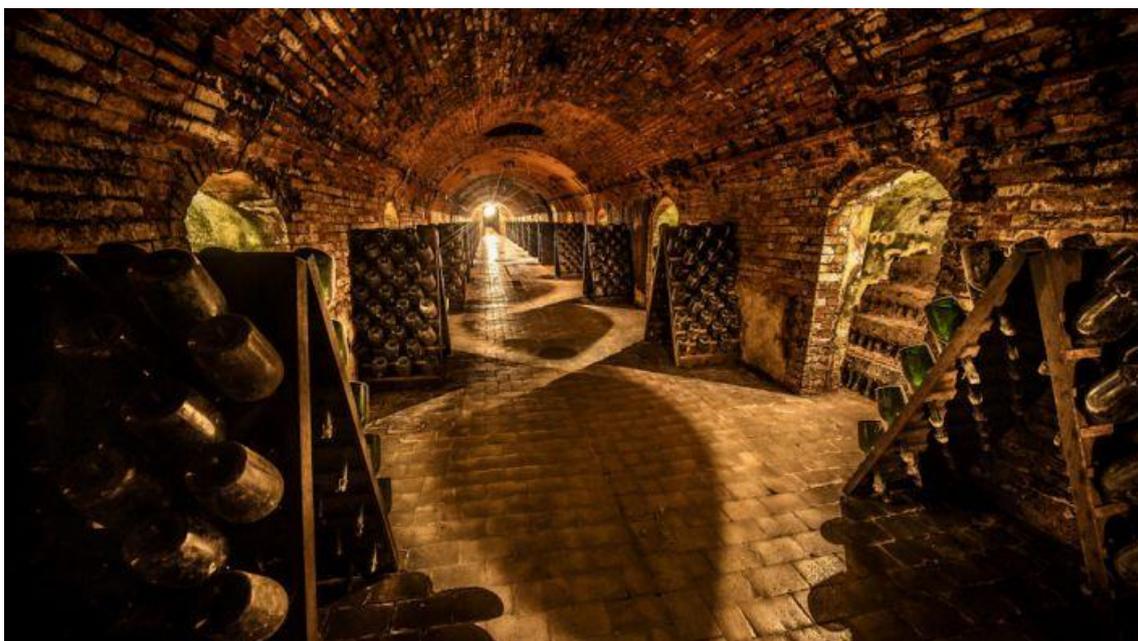


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2021's summer sparkle



Numbers are becoming more and more significant in Champagne. But there are many non-champagnes among these 86 tasting notes on this summer's releases.

Numbers, numbers, numbers will be increasingly important for champagne drinkers.

I have been campaigning for more information on champagne labels for 30 years, ever since I had a column in *Wine Spectator* in the US. My tiresomely repeated argument (most recently in [this 2012 article](#)) has been that wine drinkers who pay champagne prices are owed some way of knowing what they are paying for. For too long, the great majority of champagne on the market has been a non-vintage blend for which no clue was given as to the age of that blend, the principal year that it comprised.

The argument was that non-vintage blends were exactly the same year in, year out so there was no need to distinguish between them, but that view was well and truly trashed when no less a power in champagne than the house of Krug [acknowledged that each blend was different](#) and decided to explicitly label each bottling of its multi-vintage Grande Cuvée blends differently with, first, an ID number and now each annual 'Édition' with a different number.

The new wave of producers of single-estate champagnes, sometimes called grower champagnes, are notably good at providing information. Their back labels often specify not only the exact vintage

composition of the blend, but the precise varietal assemblage and provenance of the grapes – plus the date the wine was put in the cellar, the date of disgorgement and the dosage. Quite a lot of information to get on a label! But some producers, including Alexandre Penet/Penet-Chardonnet, whose current releases are reviewed below, have devised particularly clever ways of including it.

You may say this is too much detail, but I would argue that no one is forced to read this information. And geeks like me seriously appreciate it.

The big brands are generally much less generous with their data, but there has definitely been a move towards more explicit information. Bruno Paillard was a pioneer and even the giant Moët & Chandon is slowly moving in the right direction (see [From naff to nice](#)).

But at least two of the most significant champagnes reviewed below are new offerings to be labelled numerically. Perhaps the most important is Louis Roederer's new replacement for its already-estimable non-vintage blend Brut Premier. From now on it will carry a cuvée number, a bit like Jacquesson's non-vintage blend, and will be called Collection X, X being determined by how many annual blends have been made by Roederer. So the non-vintage blend that is already on sale in Europe and will be launched in the UK and US in September is called Collection 242. See the tasting note for details of this exciting new wine that is being 'positioned' as distinctly superior to most NVs, as Roederer wines tend to be.

When presenting the latest Cristal, the 2013, online last April, technical director Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon dropped a heavy hint that something important was to be launched. The labelling is almost identical, except for the words 'Collection 242' – oh, and the price has definitely not gone down. But it promises to be an utterly reliable choice, and to consciously express each growing season, with the addition of more reserve wine than before, not least from a perpetual reserve, as the Champenois call their version of a solera.

Another significant move towards numerical labelling comes from Laurent-Perrier, whose delicious prestige cuvée, a 'perfect' blend of three mature vintages, has until now been sold with precious little background given to the general consumer (see the middle section of [Champagne cussedness](#)). You still can't tell from the bottle exactly what's in it, except that it's a 'recreation of a perfect vintage' but the recently released magnums of the latest blend of Grand Siècle carry 'No 23' on the front of the neck label and on the back label, because this is the 23rd blend of Grand Siècle – and jolly nice it is too – miraculously fresh. This is quite a breakthrough and the first time a Grand Siècle customer can distinguish between different blends.

A bottle of Laurent-Perrier's current non-vintage was delightfully vibrant when poured before a Sunday lunch the weekend before last. (Remember being entertained in friends' houses? I do, from the pre-coronavirus era, but only just...) Laurent-Perrier's man in the UK, David Hesketh MW, tells me that it is based on 2015 with 30% reserve wines from 2014 – although, again, you need connections to know this.

Champagne gossips (including me) will want to know who is in charge of the deep, dark, damp cellars under Tours-sur-Marne where all the Laurent-Perrier magic takes place (see main image above; bottles and magnums of Grand Siècle are still hand-riddled).

A couple of years ago they announced that their long-serving chef de cave Michel Fauconnier would be handing over to Dominique Demarville, his very well-known counterpart at Veuve Clicquot. But Demarville left Laurent-Perrier after all too short a time, the rumour being that Fauconnier was not exactly welcoming. When I asked founder Bernard de Nonancourt's granddaughter Lucie Pereyre de Nonancourt and global director of Grand Siècle (nice job) Edouard Cossy as they presented No 23 to

me online who was to succeed Fauconnier, I was told that there would be an internal promotion. So now you (sort of) know.

More numbers: Philipponnat call their prestige, grand cru, range 1522 after the date the Philipponnat family settled in Aÿ. They have recently added an LV cuvée to the range, LV standing for *longue veillessement*, or extended ageing. The current blend is a 2000.

The 86 champagnes and sparkling wines reviewed below have been grouped as shown and are presented in alphabetical order of producer (sur)name but you can change this.