



BIENVENUE!

Welcome to a very different Champagne Guide

It was a tremendous honour to be named International Champagne Writer of the Year 2011 in The Louis Roederer International Wine Writers' Awards for The Champagne Guide 2011, bringing this award to Australia for the very first time. But this book in no way rests on the laurels of the last. The 2012-2013 edition is more than double the size, providing even more detailed insights into more than twice as many champagnes (more than 400 from almost 100 different makers), every bottle of which has been tasted recently.

This book is founded on taste. I have again this year fought my way through the froth and bubble of the most overmarketed wine region in the world, ruthlessly culling every hint of superfluous waffle that gushes from glossy, big-brand marketing campaigns. There is no place for shallow rhetoric, flirtations with royalty, sightings with supermodels, illustrious histories, grand estates or elaborate packaging in this guide.

All that counts here is what's in the glass. This book gets under the surface of Champagne to unearth the terroirs, the grapes, the craft and the people that make the wine in your glass smell, taste and bubble like no other on the planet.

To guarantee that you're up to speed with the very latest in Champagne, I've updated all fifty-two champagne producers that appeared in last year's guide and added a thumping forty-three more. Commentary on the current state of play in the region has been fully updated and expanded, and you'll discover gripping new chapters on capturing minerality, making sense of biodynamics and organics, the latest trends in dosage, the grower versus house dilemma and the ongoing saga of out-of-condition champagnes. By popular demand, I've added a list of champagnes by score, a guide to visiting Champagne, addresses for every house and a Top Forty Australian Sparkling Wines. This book introduces a new Champagne Hall of Fame and features hundreds of brand new photographs and the most detailed and up-to-date maps of Champagne in print.

The paramount importance of an annual update in the champagnes to drink this year is just as critical as it is for any other wine style. Time is everything in the development of champagne, and just a year after the publication of my inaugural guide, the landscape of the wines on the shelves has changed dramatically.

New vintages have landed and non-vintages have rolled on to the next blend. Non-vintage champagne is always based heavily on one or two years, and regardless of the skill of the blender or the depth of reserve wines on hand, the blend will always change according to the raw materials presented by an ever more temperamental mother nature.

and present a different personality accordingly. Furthermore, different disgorgements are often based upon subtly different blends, if not completely different base wines altogether. Many houses tweak the dosage to best complement each disgorgement.

This presents a dilemma in communicating meaningful guidance on each cuvée and so I have gone about compiling this book unlike any other champagne guide. Every champagne featured here was tasted recently, almost exclusively between July and October 2011. I spent a fortnight tasting intensively in Champagne in July, an unusual and in many ways inconvenient time to visit, because this month presented the best window to taste the disgorgements headed to export for Christmas 2011.

Not all champagnes cross the equator as confidently as others, and the concerns that I raised last year regarding storage, care of handling and timely arrival into export markets have only been exacerbated in my tastings this year, so much so that I have earnestly sought to retaste as many wines in Australia as physically possible, in some cases three or four times for single cuvées.

This has all led me to a bold step which may be unprecedented in champagne publishing: inclusion not only of the disgorgement date and the location and date of tasting but also of different scores for the same cuvée when these details change. This inclusion has compounded the complexity of researching and compiling this guide exponentially (and completing it in time for Christmas nearly killed me!) but I am convinced that there is no other way in which champagne can be fairly interpreted for its markets across the globe.

Two examples. As this book goes to print, there will be three disgorgements of Ayala Rosé Brut Majeur NV in the Australian market disgorged, respectively, in 2006, 2009 and 2011 and varying in score in my recent tastings from 85 to 90 points. And disgorgements of Taittinger Cuvée Brut Prestige Rosé NV disgorged between 2007 and 2011 spanning a colossal range from 87 to 95 points. Failure to distinguish these would be like publishing three reviews of Marlborough sauvignon blanc from different years without naming the vintages.

I have resisted the urge to add drinking windows to my notes this year. The complexities of champagne ageing pre- and post-disgorgement confound any guidance that I could offer. A late-disgorged champagne freshly plucked from a very cold chalk cellar under the house where it was made will always tell a very different story to the same wine disgorged and shipped decades ago and kept far away under different conditions. This is further exacerbated by the different dosage treatment of late-disgorged wines, typically receiving less sugar than their younger counterparts. In recent years I have admired champagnes from six decades, and marvelled at the freshness of recently disgorged old bottles, but any attempt to extrapolate this to the lifespan of early-disgorged wines is meaningless. I have, however, made note of champagnes with the potential to age, and those coming to the end of their drinking plateau.

Publishing a true annual champagne guide to this level of detail, featuring only recently tasted, current disgorgements proved to be a monumental undertaking. The pace of change in the champagne landscape around the world this year is nothing short of astounding and champagne lovers the world over are thirsty for fresh guidance. The increasing international interest in this publication has led me to publish some cuvées not available in Australia at the time of publication. These are denoted by an absence of recommended retail price.

Here in Australia we popped 3.7 million bottles last year, trumping the previous year's record by twenty-five percent and holding our position as ninth in the world for champagne consumption. Per capita, this puts us in the top five. Currency fluctuations have smoothed the seas for more imports from an ever-diverse range of sources, leading to unprecedented choice and breathtaking discounting like never seen before.

A new era in champagne has arrived and there has never been a better time to raise a glass of the most celebrated beverage on earth. Get ready to sparkle.

