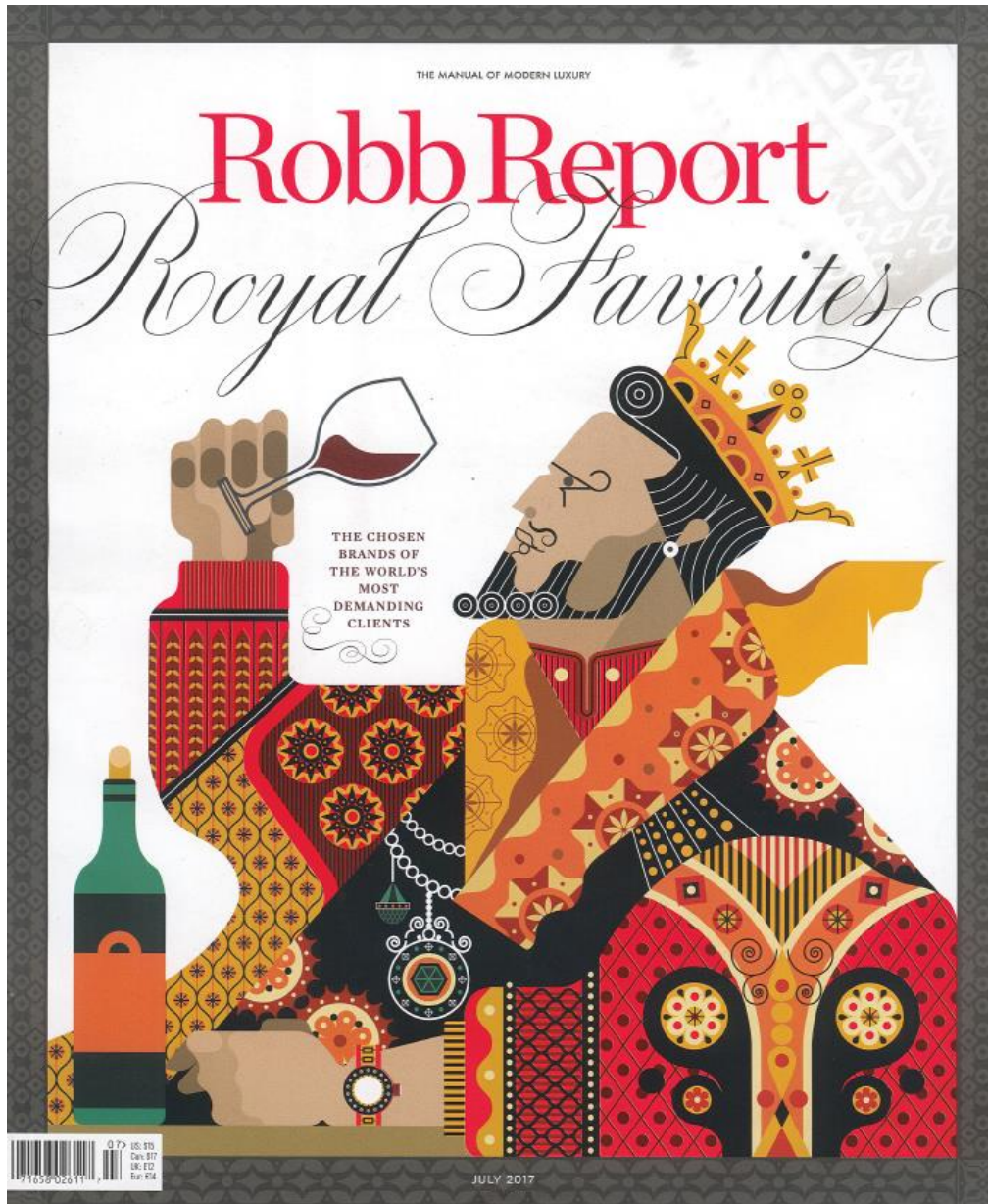




NEWS

# Robb Report

July 2017



Champagne



Winston Churchill's thirst for the wines of Pol Roger deepened when he met Odiette Pol-Roger in 1944 at an embassy luncheon.

## Bottles Royale

FOR CENTURIES, CHAMPAGNE HAS BEEN THE PREFERRED WINE OF KINGS AND QUEENS—THANKS, IN PART, TO THE WINE PRODUCERS THEMSELVES. HERE IS HOW THE LEADING CHAMPAGNE HOUSES OF THAT FAMOUS FRENCH REGION FOUGHT TO WIN OVER THE ROYAL HOUSES OF EUROPE.

BY ROGER MORRIS

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*s horse racing* is the sport of kings, so Champagne is the drink of kings—as well as queens, princesses, princes, and every other member of the royal household, including an official mistress or two. Indeed, no other wine rivals Champagne's

many ties to Europe's ruling houses—thanks to the untiring intrigues of the great *maisons* of Champagne, who in many cases sought to promote their products through royal and aristocratic associations. Their collective campaign encompasses the celebratory glamour of the multiple coronations of French kings at the Reims Cathedral; battles with Burgundy for royal attention, when Champagne was still an anemic red wine; triumph during the long reign of Louis XIV of France, whose physician prescribed large daily doses of Champagne; daring forays across battle lines by the *maisons'* representatives, who sought to reach the court of the tsar when Russia was at war with France; and, most recently, the granting of royal warrants to a select group of Champagne houses by the United Kingdom's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles.

Still, despite the valor and determination of Champagne's exponents, the region owes its success as a purveyor of royally preferred wines less to oenology than to geography. Reims, located in the greater Marne Valley and today the center of Champagne winemaking, was an early outpost of Roman culture, which propagated the planting of grapevines. The city later gained importance as the seat of powerful Catholic clergymen, including Archbishop St. Remi, who anointed Clovis king of the Franks in 496 by applying balm from the Holy Ampulla. Reims's fame spread further with the building of its Notre-Dame Cathedral, the construction and decoration of which began in 1211 and continued for centuries. This magnificent gothic edifice, once completed, became a favored venue for the coronation of kings.

Between 1223 and 1825, a total of 25 French monarchs were crowned at Reims, beginning with Louis VIII and ending with Charles X. During the Hundred Years' War, the cathedral was occupied by the English before being liberated by Joan of Arc in 1429, just in time for the Dauphin to be crowned Charles VII beneath its spires and rose window. Significantly, these ceremonies drew foreign nobility, many from countries that did not produce wine. These dignitaries, after feasting on local food and wines, spread the reputation of this drink, Champagne.

However, the liquid that filled cups at these early fetes bore no resemblance to the bubbly we sip today: It was not until the 17th century that Champagne—originally an agreeable red, often comparing unfavorably to those of Burgundy—emerged as a beautiful, vibrant sparkling wine. The secondary fermentation required to arrive at this state (which occurred naturally at first) often broke the period's weaker bottles. Many winemakers considered these troublesome

The J<sup>r</sup> Hon<sup>ble</sup>  
Winston Churchill M.P.

Special Appointment  
TO HER MAJESTY THE LATE QUEEN VICTORIA  
TO THE LATE KING WILLIAM THE THIRD

BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT  
TO HER MAJESTY THE LATE QUEEN VICTORIA  
TO THE LATE KING WILLIAM THE THIRD

TO RANDOLPH PAYNE & SONS,  
Importers of Wines, Spirits and Liqueurs.  
61, ST. JAMES'S STREET,  
LONDON, S.W.

1897

1908

Amount of 1906 + 1907 accounts  
as rendered 31 Dec 1907

	£	s	d
March 5 dozen bottles 1900 St. Remy	44	4	6
dozen half bottles do	21	2	11
dozen Port	28	2	8
dozen 1896 St. Raphael	30	1	10
dozen Black 1900	42	2	2
dozen Scotch Whisky, James Watson	48	2	8
dozen pale Sherry	38	1	8
6 bottles Old Brandy, J. & F. Martell	44	2	8
6 bottles Cognac, J. & F. Martell	34	1	4
3 bottles Brandy	30	1	6
3 bottles St. Remy	45	1	5
6 bottles Best Brandy	48	5	0
6 bottles Benedictine	44	8	0
6 bottles D.O.M.	72	6	0
6 bottles French Brandy	44	7	0
6 bottles Orange Brandy	44	5	0
total out	£	571	2

THE CHARTWELL TRUST



In 1908, the head of the House of Habsburg-Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph granted Veuve Clicquot an imperial warrant. His personal favorite was rosé.

#### TALES FROM THE CHAMPAGNE CONNECTION

While many royals historically began their daily drinking with a glass of Champagne, Queen Elizabeth, now 91, likes to finish her day with one. According to her late cousin Margaret Rhodes, the queen begins her daily imbibing with a preunch gin and Dubonnet on the rocks with lemon, and she finishes the day with a glass or two of Champagne before bedtime. Rhodes offered no insight on how the monarch chooses which of the eight producers with royal warrants to honor each evening.

bubbles a flaw, and opinion was split between those who delighted in the gas-infused wines and those who strived to keep their wines still.

During this critical time, Louis XIV, "the Sun King," ascended to the throne in 1643—at age 4. Over the next 72 years of his reign, the sun-dappled sovereign served as Champagne's most visible brand ambassador. On the advice of his doctor, Antoine d'Aquin, he drank Champagne at every meal for most of his life. (That is, until his later years, when a new doctor prescribed a Burgundy cure.)

A favorite of the court at Versailles during the reign of Louis XV, the Sun King's great-grandson and successor, was Claude Moët, who founded his Champagne house in 1743 and quickly became a supplier to Madame de Pompadour. This official mistress to Louis XV famously said, "Champagne is the only drink that leaves a woman still beautiful after drinking it." Claude's grandson, Jean-Rémy Moët, continued courting the court, having met Napoléon Bonaparte by chance in 1782 at the latter's military academy, where he introduced him to Champagne. In 1801, Napoléon and his mother purchased 100 bottles of Moët "Rosé," the ancestor of today's Moët Imperial Rosé. Three years later, Napoléon became emperor and regularly stopped in Reims to purchase Champagne from Moët whenever he passed through the region on military campaigns.

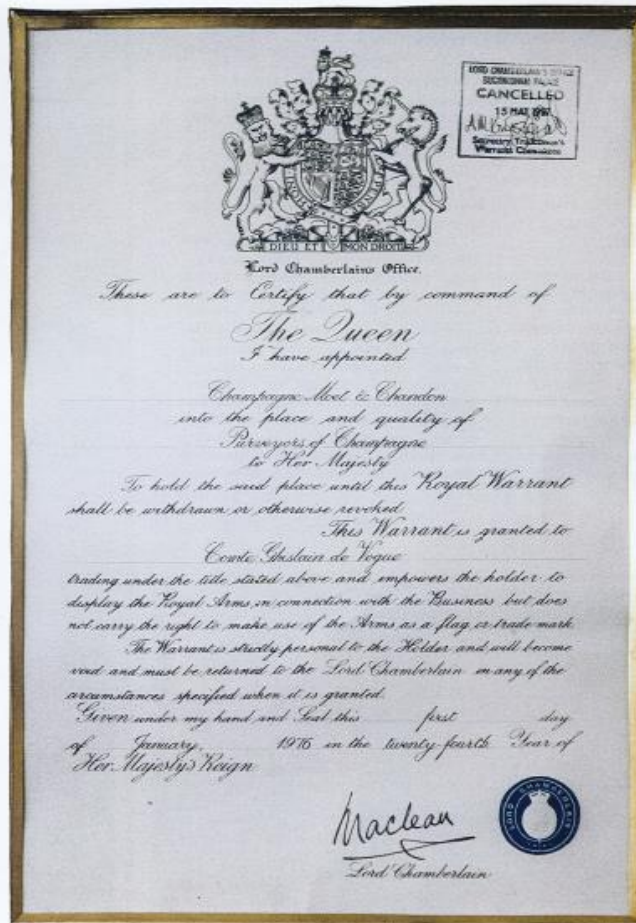
FRANZ JOSEPH: DEAGUSTINIS/GETTY IMAGES; MOËT & CHANDON (BARRATT); OTHER HISTORICAL IMAGES: PRINCE CHARLES: TIM GRANAVESSETTY IMAGES

## White Noët was

basking in imperial favor, Ruinart—founded in 1729 and the oldest existing producer of sparkling Champagne—was calling on Napoléon's first wife, the Empress Joséphine, to sell his wares. But Ruinart's advantage was short-lived: After Joséphine divorced Napoléon in 1810, she refused to pay her bills for the bubbly.

Russia, with its vast empire and the cosmopolitan allure of the ruling Romanovs, also became a tempting target for Champagne producers, even during times of war. When Napoléon invaded Russia, the Russian government banned the sale of bottled French wines—but realizing that Champagne could not be shipped in barrels as still wines could, the always-resourceful Barbe-Nicole Ponsardin Clicquot found a way around the embargo. At the time, Reims was occupied by Prussian soldiers allied with Russia, so the Widow Clicquot caused a diversion by opening her cellars to the troops while her agent loaded 10,000 bottles of Veuve Clicquot on a Dutch vessel waiting in a nearby port. The vessel set sail for Russia, where its cargo found its way into the glass of Tsar Alexander I. After the war ended, Russia became a primary market for Veuve Clicquot, as well as for other Champagnes.

Louis Roederer was another favorite of the Russian court; indeed, the Romanovs were responsible for the creation of the firm's now-famous Cristal brand. In 1876, Tsar Alexander II requested that his favorite Champagne house make a wine that came in a clear bottle—not an ideal arrangement, perhaps, for long-term aging, but a practical example of the rewards to be reaped by giving the customer what he wants. The Russian palate also preferred an even sweeter cuvée than was already then popular. Roederer quickly complied with the requests, and thus Cristal was born. Unfortunately for Roederer, the firm was so entrenched in the Russian market that, when Alexander's grandson Nicholas II was forced to abdicate in 1917, the house took an enormous financial hit.



Moët & Chandon has long been a royal favorite, as this 1976 warrant from the Lord Chamberlain attests.

● ● Moët's cellars reportedly lost 600,000 bottles of Champagne to the occupying Russian army after the defeat of Napoléon. Jean-Rémy Moët told friends, "All of those soldiers who are ruining me today will make my fortune tomorrow. I'm letting them drink all they want. They will be hooked for life and become my best salesmen when they go back

to their own country."

True to his prediction, the House of Moët quickly became a staple in the cellars of enemies of Napoléon including Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington; King Frederick William III of Prussia; King William II of the Netherlands; Holy Roman Emperor Francis II and Tsar Alexander I of Russia.

Other royalty across Europe also jumped on the Champagne bandwagon—or boarded, as it were, the royal Champagne coach. Perrier-Jouët scored a triple-crown victory when Charles Perrier found himself selling wines to three monarchs at the same time: Napoleon III of France, Queen Victoria of England, and King Leopold II of Belgium, the latter of which has been a constitutional monarchy since its independence in 1830 and remains an important market for French wines.

Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph granted Veuve Clicquot a royal warrant in 1909 as an "imperial and court purveyor" of Champagne; his personal favorite was rosé. Veuve Clicquot also graced the glass of Queen Victoria. J. J. Kanne, who represented himself as Her Majesty's travel director, wrote Veuve



● ● One of the favorite legends of the wine world is that the Champagne coupe was shaped after Marie Antoinette's breast. This persistent account of the classic wine glass's inspiration is in fact the work of a prurient and perhaps drink-impaired imagination.

Clicquot in 1868 asking the house to send two baskets of 50 bottles each to the British embassy in Paris. The shipment, he noted, must contain the same wine as an earlier one dispatched to Lucerne, which was "consumed with great pleasure by her Majesty and the members of her retinue." Not long after, Kanne wrote: "I assure you that the wine was served at the Queen's table every day."

During Queen Victoria's reign, which lasted from 1837 until her death in 1901, the English—always eager to codify—began issuing royal warrants to Champagne producers. While various forms of officially recognizing purveyors to the court date to the 12th century, the royal warrant system that is still in use today originated with George IV, who reigned from 1820 to 1830.

Currently, over 1,100 royal warrants have been granted to tradespeople who supply goods. Eight of these warrants have been bestowed on Champagne houses, according to the Royal Warrant Holders Association, an office founded in 1840 to represent and advise the various holders. Royal warrants,



Eight Champagne houses currently hold warrants from the British royal family, seven of them from Queen Elizabeth II herself.

● ● When George V ascended to the English throne in 1911, he frequently served guests his "special bottle" of Bollinger at Balmoral Castle, the royal estate in the Scottish Highlands. The bottle in question was Bollinger's basic nonvintage brut, but the British importer of the wine then and now, Mentzendorff, wrote to Bollinger in France suggesting they officially name the wine "Special Cuvée," using the combination of English and French spellings. Bollinger has called its nonvintage brut by that name since.

which cannot be purchased, are linked directly to a specific member of the immediate royal household. Members authorized to confer this honor include Queen Elizabeth, who determines the list, Prince Philip, and Prince Charles. Each of the three can individually grant warrants for 5 years; the warrants can be renewed, as long as the warrant holder is providing goods. The goods are not gifts, but outright purchases by the court.

England's first Champagne warrants were issued in 1884, and the current holders are Bollinger, G. H. Mumm & Cie, Krug, Lanson, Louis Roederer, Laurent-Perrier, Moët & Chandon, and Veuve Clicquot. Aside from Laurent-Perrier, which solely serves Prince Charles, the Champagnes are all suppliers to Queen Elizabeth, who is said to drink a glass or two at the end of each day.

Holding a warrant offers no specific commercial advantage beyond bragging rights, although an insignia can be displayed on bottles according to rules laid out by the Lord Chamberlain. "Bollinger proudly features the Royal Warrant on each bottle it produces—not for any commercial reason, but because we believe it is an honor," says Bollinger's commercial director, Guy de Rivoire. "And because, like other companies holding the warrant, we believe it can be perceived by some as augmenting the profile of a brand."

One notable case of a British head of state without royal blood enjoying a unique relationship with a Champagne house involves Winston Churchill. Churchill began drinking Pol Roger as early as 1908. The bond between statesman and vintner was forged the moment Churchill met Odette Pol-Roger at the British Embassy in 1944. The prime minister was so smitten by her beauty and wit that he named a racehorse after her—one that, incidentally, won a stakes race on the day that Queen Elizabeth was crowned in 1952. When Churchill died in 1965, Pol Roger put a black border on its labels, and in 1984 it launched, with the Churchill family's permission, the Pol Roger Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill. As his daughter, Mary Soames, once said of Churchill's fondness for Pol Roger, "I saw him many times the better for it, but never the worse."

QUEEN ELIZABETH: TIM SHAMSBERRY IMAGES; BOLLINGER: HISTORIC/REYNOLDS/GETTY IMAGES; CHAMPAGNE GLASS: BOLLINGER