

Decanter

First taste: Bollinger La Grande Année 2008, then a century back in time

A new label, a redesigned bottle and some impressive technology: Bollinger rings the changes with the release of the eagerly anticipated 2008 La Grande Année...

Aldo Fiordelli
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On 26 March in Aÿ, Champagne, Bollinger launched its latest La Grande Année, the 2008. This Champagne is not only the millesimé of the house, but also its cornerstone of style.

The Bollinger vineyard area today covers 178ha, most of which is classified as grand or premier cru. Pinot Noir predominates – a demanding grape which forms the backbone of the Bollinger style.

Grapes for La Grande Année 2008 are sourced from 18 sites, mostly in Aÿ and Verzenay on the Montagne de Reims, and from Mesnil sur Oger and Cramant on the Côte des Blancs.

Vinification takes place exclusively in small oak barrels (20 years old on average), maintained by Bollinger's own cooperage. The 2008 vintage spent more than nine years ageing on its lees.

Riddling is performed entirely by hand with at least 45 turns, and disgorging is done à la volée – relying on quick reactions and human skill rather than by freezing the neck.

'Beyond being the house's unique expression of a harvest, this cuvée is also the fruit of traditional expertise that has become rare in Champagne,' commented cellar master Gilles Descôtes.

New technology

La Grande Année usually ennobles Bollinger's deliberately oxidative style, which is seen as central to the house's long-lived style. However, there has been criticism in the past about occasional bottle variation, a consequence of the 'by hand' expertise employed.

The arrival in 2014 of the 'jetting' procedure, combined with the outstanding 2008 vintage, seems to have changed the whole picture. Jetting allows a micro-drop of wine to be shot into the neck of the bottle just before being corked, which encourages foaming and thus decreases the amount of oxygen remaining in the bottle. Does it work? The 2008 La Grande Année shows the oxidative style of the house yet with an increased freshness.

A taste of history

Whilst it was only in 1976 that this Champagne took the name of Grande Année, becoming La Grande Année in 1997, the release of the 2008 vintage was a rare opportunity to taste the poignant (and delicious) century-old 1918 vintage, as well as examples from 1983, 1989 and 1992.

The 1918 was not disgorged until 1969, during the restoration campaign of Elisabeth Bollinger's personal wine cellar. Remembered as cheerful and witty, Madame Jacques – as she was nicknamed, after her late husband, Jacques Bollinger – was a dauntless businesswoman and the driving force behind the innovative RD cuvée.

La Grande Année 2008 and a century back in time:



Bollinger, La Grande Année, Champagne, 2008

+ Add to My Wines

In 2008, the remarkable maturity of the grapes combined with an amazing acidity has produced a vintage of great balance, concentration and depth. The wine was aged for nine years on its lees, then for another year following disgorgement. Bright straw in colour with pinprick bubbles, it blooms on the ...

Points 97



Bollinger, Grande Année, Champagne, France, 1992

+ Add to My Wines

This was the hottest year since 1962, but it was also rainy. Budburst began on 21 April and flowering in mid-June. According to Bollinger's vintage report, the Chardonnay was beautiful (indeed, it's unusually high proportion of the blend), while the Pinot Noir needed some sorting. Disgorged in December 2018, the ...



\$ 149.95

Points

90



Bollinger, Grande Année, Champagne, France, 1989

+ Add to My Wines

Summer marked the end of the worries (frost, millerandage, coulure) and propelled the Champagne region towards harvest. The Chardonnay was picked on 4 September and the Pinot Noir on 12 September. It was a warm vintage of relatively low yields. This shows notes of lime flowers, lemon pulp, strawberry and ...



\$ 149.95

Points

93



Bollinger, Grande Année, Champagne, 1983

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The miracle of a very fine summer and mild autumn compensated for a particularly difficult spring, which delayed the growing season. The yields were actually quite high in the end. Disgorged in December 2018, the wine is a lively gold colour in the glass, with an Annurca apple aroma, slightly ...

Points 92



Bollinger, Champagne, 1918

+ Add to My Wines

The 1918 season resulted in large losses of grapes, with extremely low average yields in Champagne of 2,000kg/ha due to spring frosts. But there was also a lack of cultivation due to the Great War, as many vineyards were situated in the combat zone - the notorious Battle of Belleau ...

Points 96