

Forbes

A Conversation With Bollinger On Their Newest R.D. Champagne

In 1967, Madame Lily Bollinger introduced the world to a new style of Champagne with the [Bollinger House](#)'s special-release vintage of recently disgorged (R.D.) wine. Today, the Maison still honors this signature style and just announced the release of its latest vintage Champagne Bollinger R.D. 2008.

"R.D. 2008 is a masterpiece," beams Cyril Delarue, sixth-generation Bollinger family member. "The contrast between the deep freshness on the mouth and the intensity of the aromas on the nose is spectacular. The wine develops aromas of roast, dry fruits, hazelnuts, and a very interesting texture that is reminiscent of the peanut."



The recently disgorged vintage allows the wine more time to mature in the house cellar on the lees under cork, and is disgorged by hand shortly before its release. With a very low dosage, the wine is able to express both the complexities of an old vintage with vivacity and crispness. The process is timely and not all years allow for the development of an R.D.

"There are two key things you need – an excellent harvest (2008 was an exceptional year) and winemaking technique," explains Delarue. The quality of grapes is imperative as well, especially the Pinot Noir grapes which dominate the 2008 vintage, 71 percent to 29 percent Chardonnay. Delarue says they look for flavor, ripeness and healthiness across at least 14 different Premieres and Grand Crus. For R.D. 2008, Bollinger used 18 crus, mainly Aÿ and Verzenay for the Pinot Noir, Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Cramant for the Chardonnay.

Once the blend is distinguished, the wines are laid to rest for seven years, at which point the wines are tasted to determine whether the wines warrant a release as La Grande Année (LGA), which doesn't happen every year, and whether they can continue to rest for another seven years to reach the quality desired of R.D. "This is a difficult decision: shall we age some of LGA to make R.D.?", explains Delarue on the dilemma. "This decision is taken based on a few elements, one of the most important of them being the wine's ability to maintain its exceptional freshness through the years."

LGA and R.D. share the same blend, however, the two differences are the time on lees — seven versus 14, respectively — and the time after disgorgement before the wine can be shipped from Bollinger — eight to 12 months for LGA and four months for R.D. Though R.D. 2008 was disgorged in October 2022, Delarue shares there will be two more future disgorgement dates to allow more time on the lees; October 2023 and "most likely" October 2024.

R.D. 2008 is the second consecutive release from the Maison, which is "unusual" according to Delarue. "While 2008 is one of the best vintages of the last decades, 2007 was a bit of a surprise," he shares. "Not so many producers released a 2007 vintage, and even less this type of Oenotheque wine." Compared to the current vintage, R.D. 2007 offers "an incredible energy, and very interesting spice flavors," says Delarue, which is why they worked with a saffron producer from Corsica in France to pair the wine with dishes that include saffron. The R.D. 2008 vintage's nuttiness lends itself to hazelnuts from Langhe, Italy.

"When R.D. was first created, Aunt Lily recommended that sommeliers pair the wine with food," explains Delarue on the importance of the food pairings with each vintage. In honor of Madame Bollinger's innovative approach, the Maison decided to match the Piedmont hazelnut, grown by Emanuele Canaparo, with the 2008 vintage. "Both Emanuele and Bollinger strive for a culture of excellence, they respect and enhance the terroirs entrusted to them and they pass down their knowledge, and the passion that comes from managing a family run business, from generation to generation."

Delarue shares that the Maison also maintains Madame Bollinger's legacy through their current wines by dedicating two words to each vintage. The first describes the vintage, thus it changes, however, the second is always the same: boldness. The term honors Aunt Lily's "boldness" to have released such a long aging wine, with low dosage and recent disgorgement at a time when other houses wouldn't dare.

"We are still following the philosophy she established for the House: the fragile balance between our five pillars, the search for excellence even if it means to slow down production or refuse to speed up sales," continues Delarue. "She released [R.D. 1967] out of pure passion and because she noticed this plot was so different from other Aÿ plots, but I am not sure she could have imagined this would become one of the rarest Champagnes in the world one day."

Champagne Bollinger R.D. 2008 will be available stateside this spring for SRP \$440.