



OPPOSITE Publicity card illustrated by Jean d'Ylen for Joseph Perrier Champagne, c. 1920.

CONTENTS

WHAT IS CHAMPAGNE?	10	4 CHAMPAGNE CULTURE	152
1 HISTORY IN A BOTTLE	12	The Rise and Rise of Champagne	154
The Time Machine	14	Champagne and Art	156
The Man Behind the Bubbles	24	The Masters of the Champagne Poster	160
The First Champagne Houses	28	Maxim's: The Temple of Champagne	166
Champagne's Belle Époque	36	Champagne Icons and Ambassadors	168
Tensions Behind the Bubbles	42	Champagne 007: Secret Agent of Seduction	174
		Ab Fab Girl-Power Pop	178
		Planes, Trains and Automobiles	180
2 THE CAMPAIGN FOR CHAMPAGNE	46	5 FROM GRAPE TO GLASS	184
Growing the Market	48	The Science of Champagne	186
The Great Champagne Producers	54	The Champagne Region	198
Gosset: Old-World Style	56	A Question of Style	206
Ruinart: The Statesman	58	Serving Bubbles at their Best	212
Taittinger: The Gastronomer	60	Tasting Champagne	218
Moët & Chandon: The Imperialist	64	What Does a Champagne Label Tell You?	220
Lanson: Stately Elegance	70	How to Open a Bottle of Champagne	222
Veuve Clicquot: The Industrialist	72	Matching Champagne with Food	224
Mercier and Heidsieck: The Great Exhibitionists	78		
Jaquesson & Fils: Emperor's Jewel	86	6 REFERENCES	228
Drappier: Father Pinot	88	Aide-Memoire	230
Henriot: Enduring Family Tradition	90	Glossary of Champagne Terms	232
Billecart-Salmon: Tradition Meets Innovation	92	Glossary of Tasting Terms	233
Mumm: Germanic Greatness	94	General Index	234
Bollinger: The Traditionalist	98	Bibliography	239
Deutz: Back from the Brink	104	Picture Credits	240
Krug: Making their Marque	106		
Pol Roger: The Most British of Champagnes	110		
Salon: One Man's Dream	114		
Selosse: A Heretic in Champagne	116		
Feuillatte: The Celebrity Magnate	120		
Paillard: The Champagne Aesthete	122		
3 THE WOMEN BEHIND THE BUBBLES	126		
The Mighty Matriarchs of Champagne	128		
La Grande Dame	130		
Madame Olry-Roederer	134		
Ladies of Laurent-Perrier	136		
Inheriting the Mantle	138		
Madame Pommery	140		
A Modern First Lady of Champagne	146		
A Triumphant Trio	150		

unpleasant manner towards his fellows. Any wine surplus produced by an abbey would be sold locally to bring in maintenance funds. Naturally, the most valuable members of any monastery's workforce were the vintner, the fisherman and the cook. Christianity was very closely interwoven into the fabric of medieval daily life.

The Counts system of royal regional government worked well enough during Charlemagne's lifetime, but within a few generations, the powerful Archbishop of Reims was already plotting with one of the Counts to destabilise the French throne. Hugh Capet claimed that a king was not entitled to inherit the crown, but could receive it through his own merit. He proved his point by capturing and imprisoning his closest opponent, Charles de Basse Lorraine, thereby eliminating him from the line of succession. The ascendancy of Reims over Paris as the spiritual capital of France was confirmed by the coronation of Hugh Capet at Reims in July 987 AD. More than 400 years later, Joan of Arc reminded Charles VII, then the Dauphin, "Sire, kings of France are made at Reims" and thus the 'sanctity' of Reims was imprinted on French consciousness. Up until the French Revolution (1789), 36 kings and 11 queens of France came to be crowned at Reims and all of them made substantial donations to the church's local vineyard holdings. Before the Revolution, the church was the largest landholder in France and in 1825, during the Bourbon Restoration period, Charles X was the thirty-seventh and final French King to be crowned in Reims Cathedral.

THE CRUSADING POPE

In 1088, another miracle occurred in the Champagne region when the son of a local knight was elected Pope. He assumed the name Urban II and did much to spread the fame of the wine from his native land. Urban II quickly let it be known throughout the empire that any visiting pilgrim who thought to bring with him champagne would be assured of a warm papal reception. Perhaps it was because of the Pope's connection with Champagne that the local French nobility responded so enthusiastically to his appeal for the Second Crusade, or maybe the Champagne lords were just bored without something to fight about amongst themselves?

In any event, the order of the Knights Templar also originated in Reims and when the cream of nobility went to war, they traditionally bequeathed their vineyards to the church. At this stage of history, distinctions were already being made between 'wines of the mountain' and 'wines of the river'. The villages with the best reputation were Bouzy and Verzenay on the Montagne de Reims and Aÿ lower down in the Vallée de la Marne (where many monarchs owned personal vineyards). The Pope's publicity campaign combined with Champagne's strategic location as a natural crossroads between Flanders (north) and the Mediterranean (south), ushered in a period of peaceful prosperity throughout the region.

CHAMPAGNE FAIRS

Large farming and mercantile fairs sprang up in the four key city centres (Provins, Troyes, Lagny and Bar-sur-Aube). These events were about life's necessities (such as top-quality blankets from Brussels and basic ones from Lille, leathers from Reims and cotton bonnets from Troyes). At first, people camped just outside the town walls, but these annual events quickly became important dates in the local calendar. In due course, proper marketplaces and lodgings had to be constructed and the local Counts offered their military protection.

Before long, merchants from Spain, Italy, Germany and Flanders began attending these famous champagne fairs. Aside from the immediate trading opportunities, these regular events also provided a platform for showcasing the quality of champagne, thereby building its international reputation. Much mercantile business was conducted during these fairs and every deal was always washed down with lashings of champagne.

THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR

By the end of the 13th century, Europe had evolved into a maritime nation and the fairs lost their customers as it became more cost-effective to transport goods around Europe by ship. Once more, Champagne became a victim of its own success; this time, it was the English across the Channel who began attacking France from the west. Intent on taking the French crown for himself, English King Edward III soon arrived beneath the city walls of Reims. During the bloody Hundred Years War between France and England, Champagne was to become one of the principal theatres of battle. There were short-lived periods of peace when the French vignerons could tend to their vines, but initial resistance from the Champenois led to the English implementing a scorched earth policy, which threatened the whole wine land.

In 1417, the Duke of Burgundy attempted to annex Champagne to his recently inherited lands in Flanders. The English refused to tolerate the potential threat posed by such a powerful Burgundy domaine and once again invaded Champagne. Wine was already the most important business in Reims but, this time around, no one was able to tend their vines and all the local inhabitants were obliged to take refuge in the caves of the Montagne de Reims and the Côte des Blancs.

In 1429, a peasant girl from a village on Champagne's eastern border miraculously changed the course of this never-ending war and finally forced the English to concede defeat. Her name was Joan of Arc and she was the heroic champion of the Dauphin who was later crowned Charles VII in Reims.

As the English army fled, it stole as many casks of champagne as it could possibly carry and thus another potentially lucrative overseas market for Champagne was created.

THIS PAGE Pope Urban II (c. 1035-99), seen here consecrating a church, extended favour to pilgrims who brought gifts of champagne.





OPPOSITE The Sun King, Louis XIV, asserted the divine right of kings to drink only champagne.

THIS PAGE King Henry IV of England dining with his French mistress, Gabrielle d'Estrees. Henry was the first monarch to introduce champagne at court.



THE ORDINARY DRINK OF KINGS AND PRINCES

During the reign of the Capetian kings, the wines from the best vineyards in Champagne were as highly rated as they are today. Even in times of war, wines from this region would be floated down the Marne to Paris or dispatched in wagons to Belgium. At this point in history, Champagne's fame began to compete head to head with the reputation of Burgundy. By the time of Henry III's coronation, champagne had overtaken burgundy as France's most expensive wine and its biggest fans were always men of power – popes and politicians.

In 1397, Wenceslas, King of Bohemia and the Holy Roman Emperor arrived in Reims to make peace with Charles VI on the schism that was splitting the church. He was also keen to see first-hand if the wines of the region lived up to their reputation – unfortunately for him, they did. He was drunk throughout the conference and was happy to sign any document put in front of him on the proviso that his hosts continue to refill his champagne cup.

The English were also very fond of this delicious beverage – King Henry IV owned vineyards and had installed his own winepress in Aÿ, and was the first monarch to introduce champagne at court. After the Battle of Agincourt, his successor Henry V decided champagne wine was far too strong for one's health and declared that, henceforth, champagne would only be given to his army ready mixed with water.

THE DARLING OF RENAISSANCE EUROPE

Methods of viticulture and wine-making were vastly improved during the 15th century and the close and prolonged contact between the French and Italians during the series of wars under Charles VIII and Louis XII also brought new ideas into France. By the time François I was crowned in Reims in 1515, the Renaissance had clearly arrived in France and so had the wine trade. A sophisticated man of letters and another great patron of the arts, François was also considerate enough to wage war away from the Champagne wine field, which had already suffered an overdose of military conflicts.

During this period, Champagne also cast a magic spell on all of Europe's leaders. Pope Leo X and Henry VIII of England purchased properties in or near Aÿ, so that they could ensure the continuity of their own personal wine supplies, whatever happened in world affairs. The Wars of Religion and The Fronde brought further tragedy and destruction to the region, but the market for champagne wines continued to grow unabated. By the time of Louis XIII's coronation at Reims in 1610, champagne was the only wine served at the royal table. When Louis XIV was crowned at Reims in 1654, the Champenois clearly demonstrated a growing sensibility to the power of good publicity. The Sun King's favourite champagne was the red wine of Bouzy, which he always ordered from an Aÿ wine-maker called Remy Berthauld. When the head of the official coronation reception committee was presented to the King, he simply said: "Sire, we offer you our wines, our pears, our gingerbreads, our biscuits and our hearts", to which the delighted monarch replied: "That, gentlemen, is the kind of speech I like".

PALACES OF PLEASURE

For the first time in its history, France suddenly had an absolute monarch on the throne, fiercely determined to centralise government and hold the reins of power himself and not to share them with the nobles and the church. Louis was quick to assert the historical 'divine right of kings' and began imprinting his larger than life personality on the worlds of fashion, art and architecture.

Poets, playwrights and sculptors flocked to the 'bling' of Versailles, hoping to bask in the bountiful favour of the legendary Sun King. The very best artisans were employed and put to work behind the scenes at Versailles to create an intricate court lifestyle where every single gesture, step or word was considered part of a command prestige performance for one's survival.

In 1671, Vatel, one of France's very best chefs who was also personal cook to the King, actually took his own life during a banquet because he thought he had spoiled his majesty's dinner. Wine and food were at the heart of courtly life. Every gesture, every word, every mouthful the King touched was reported in great detail and



OPPOSITE Aristocratic revellers enjoy champagne during an evening party during the reign of the legendarily debauched Charles II of England.

THIS PAGE A view of the Chateau of Versailles by Jean-Baptiste Martin, 1688. Seventeenth century aristocrats and artists flocked to the 'pleasure palace' of Versailles to partake of the champagne-fuelled good life.



immediately imitated. The King's powerful endorsement of champagne meant increased demand – although Louis himself switched to light burgundy towards the end of his life when his physician Fagon persuaded him it was better for his health.

Champagne's popularity and reputation at court also grew largely through the efforts of a notorious gentlemen's club called 'L'Ordre Des Côteaux'. The original members of this group were aristocratic property-owning foodies including the Marquis de Sillery (whose family would later make and sell their own champagne), the Duc de Mortemart, the Marquis de Bois-Dauphin, the Comte d'Olonne and the Order's most famous spokesperson, Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, the Marquis de Saint-Évremond – an army-trained nobleman from Normandy who reputedly would only eat veal from Normandy, rabbits from La Roche-sur-Yon and wine from the good champagne côteaux of Aÿ, Hautvilliers and Avenay. Hence the group derivative name 'côteaux'. These elegant young dandies decided to make champagne popular at court and to maintain its position as the wine of fashion at Versailles forever. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Versailles was the sole arbiter of fashion and champagne was 'in'.

MERRY ENGLAND

Luckily for the English history of champagne, in 1661, Saint-Évremond fell out of royal favour and decided to escape to England rather than go to jail. His flamboyant style and extraordinary good taste were welcomed by Louis's cousin King Charles II, who was already quite the Francophile. Born to a French Catholic mother in 1630, until he was 10, Charles had lived in absolute luxury. But Oliver Cromwell had beheaded Charles's father before he turned 20 and the now pauper prince was forced to live in exile in Paris.

Unfortunately, Charles adopted such a debauched lifestyle that he was eventually paid a stipend to leave court. In 1660, a great feast was held at Westminster to celebrate him finally becoming King of England. It was his 30th birthday, so Louis XIV sent over both champagne and burgundy for the ceremony.

Of course, there were issues of politics and religion and significant matters of state that required the King's attention, but Charles considered all these problems to be mere distractions from life's main pleasures, which were sex and entertainment. As a soul mate, the bon vivant Saint-Évremond was destined to become close friends not only with Charles II but also with England's most influential peers such as the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Crofts.

The word 'champaign' had already entered into contemporary literature and there can be no doubt that Charles enjoyed using champagne to entertain his many mistresses, including royal favourite Nell Gwyn (who began life as a common orange seller and Drury Lane actress). Champagne's growing popularity in England was demonstrated in the Sir George Etherege comedy *She Would if She Could*, first performed in 1668:

"She's no mistress of mine,
That drink's not her wine,
Or frowns at my friends' drinking notions;
If my heart though wouldst gain,
Drink thy flask of Champaign;
Twill serve thee for paint and love-potions."

Back across the Channel, Cardinal Richelieu was quoted as saying (of Versailles): "The orgies never started until everyone was in the state of abandonment only champagne can bring". Judging by the passion the 18th century's leading ladies of leisure Madame de Pompadour and Marie-Antoinette continued to demonstrate for champagne, in the spirit of pleasure that reigned in France until the Revolution of 1789, aristocratic apostles, courtesans and sovereigns were obviously the best and most effective original champagne ambassadors ever.

THE MAN BEHIND THE BUBBLES

OPPOSITE One of the many depictions of Dom Pérignon to be found at Hautvilliers Abbey.

Was it divine intervention that caused the world's most famous wine-maker to belong to the same generation as the world's most famous monarch? Dom Pierre Pérignon was almost an exact contemporary of Louis XIV – born just a few months after Louis and died just a fortnight after his sovereign. History credits Dom Pérignon with single-handedly creating the 'best wine in the world'.

Born in 1638 in Sainte-Ménéhould in the eastern part of the Champagne region, Dom Pierre Pérignon was the son of a local lawyer who entered the priesthood at Châlons-sur-Maine aged 13. When he was just 29 years old, the Catholic Church sent him to salvage the fortunes of a small, strategically located abbey originally founded by St Nirvard, which had stood for more than a thousand years watching over the Marne Valley, between Reims and Épernay. This abbey contained the holy relics of St Helena (the patron saint of the vineyard worker) and, thanks to the Holy Crusades, the diocese had gradually inherited the very best vineyards in Champagne.

Hautvilliers Abbey itself had once been a stopping place for important visitors on their way to Reims but, invaded, plundered, burned and ransacked for centuries, it was finally reduced to ruins by the Protestant Huguenots in 1562. In 1602, a handful of St Benedictine monks had returned to the cloisters but when Dom Pérignon arrived in 1668, the abbey was a shadow of its former self. The church's instructions were clear – improve the vineyards and improve the champagne – in other words, get rid of the bubbles. (During this period, fizzy champagne was a popular fad at the English royal court where cellar masters would add sugar and molasses to barrels of wine to

make the drink 'brisk and sparkling'. But elsewhere, bubbles were considered undesirable and a sign of poor wine-making.)

As procurator and cellar master, Dom Pierre Pérignon was responsible for management, administration and sales – as well as making the wines. He immediately took on the task of restoring the vineyards to their former glory. Pérignon turned out to be an extremely skilled wine-maker; his work not only ensured the monastery's material prosperity but he also introduced many notable improvements in wine-making that are still practiced today.

During his lifetime, the vineyard holdings of Hautvilliers Abbey were more than doubled and finally, through official merchants appointed to the court, by 1700, Pierre Pérignon's champagne was at last served at Versailles and recognised throughout the kingdom as 'the best wine in the world'.

There is a wonderful story about how Pierre Pérignon's particularly delicious champagne found its way to Louis XIV's royal table. There was a young lady of Champagne, Jeanne de Thierzy, known as the 'Jolie Baronne' who was married to a fanatical war hero who chose to spend all of his time on the battlefield, rather than at home with his wife. In typical Gallic fashion, Jeanne did not hesitate to take advantage of her husband's extended absences to find pleasure with other suitors. Every time she sinned, duty obliged her to confess to the nearest priest – who just happened to be Dom Pérignon. One day at confession he declared: "You sin so frequently and with





OPPOSITE Philippe d'Orleans ruled France as Regent from 1715 during the minority of Louis XV. Here he is portrayed as Bacchus, the Roman god of wine.

so little remorse, Jeanne, that I find it quite impossible to go on forgiving you," but the Baronne cried so much that, at last, Dom Pérignon took pity on her and gave her absolution.

She did not forget this favour and not long after this incident, she persuaded one of her many admirers, the Maréchal François de Créqui, Duke of Lesdiguières, who at that time was serving with her husband in Holland and being sent through Épernay with dispatches for Versailles, to promote Dom Pérignon's wine at court. When the Maréchal visited, she plied him with several bottles of the best wine from Hautvilliers. This delicious beverage served to increase the Maréchal's passions and his appreciation for his charming young hostess, so much so that he tried to break into her bedroom later that night. Attributing his behaviour to the wine he had consumed, the Jolie Baronne offered him a case to take to court with this challenge: "If you can get it used by the King, you might find it possible to obtain from me what you seemed so anxious to have."

Once at court, the Maréchal was motivated to become the most persuasive of salesmen. Louis XIV was delighted with the wine, and ordered that the Abbey of Hautvilliers should forthwith reserve a large portion of its production for the royal table. Understandably, the Maréchal could hardly wait to 'return to his troops' and galloped back to Épernay in triumph. "An eternity without pain," reasoned his hostess, "is worth one night of love without pleasure."

FOUNDATIONS OF THE FIZZ BUSINESS

By judging just the right moment to bottle his wine in the most appropriate receptacle (the strongest available glass) and by using a more modern effective seal on the bottle (a cork stopper instead of oil-soaked hemp), Dom Pérignon miraculously managed to trap the sparkle in champagne, as well as make clear, star bright white wines from red grapes. Champagne proper was born.

Just how much Dom Pérignon was appreciated as a wine-maker can be inferred from the fact that, whereas a mediocre wine of Champagne cost 200 livres, the wines of Hautvilliers cost 800 to 900 livres. Dom Pérignon remained the cellarer of Hautvilliers until his death in 1715, just a fortnight after the death of Louis XIV.

On Louis XIV's death in 1715, his nephew Philippe d'Orleans became Regent of France. His capacity for pleasure was almost as legendary as the Sun King's and he immediately moved the court to Paris. The infant Louis XV was installed in the Tuileries Palace nearby and the orgies of the Palais Royal, where the Regent would surround himself with dandies and fast young women, were an open secret in Parisian society. If the 17th century had been about power and glory, then the 18th century was all about entertainment and pleasure; the era of the *petit souper*, architectural 'follies' and the 'flying table' self-service royal banquet where aristocratic guests could drop

the formal etiquette of the court and relax with fine wine and food, openly discussing sex and politics. Champagne was of course the perfect accompaniment.

Because of a French law prohibiting the transport of wine in bottles (meant to prevent tax evasion), most wine lovers had to make do with bottles of slightly inferior, still champagne wine that would be drawn from casks already shipped to Paris. Only royalty and the most powerful men in the country could possibly procure the real thing: bottles of sparkling 'champaign' that had been aged properly in Champagne. Thus, the wines of Champagne continued along the path of intimate association with exclusivity and social status.

In 1728, by repealing the wine law, Louis XV showed himself to be a defender of Champagne and, by 1730, although still accounting for only two per cent of the market, sparkling champagne was drunk in copious quantities at every royal court in Europe. This is when the Champenois realised that, despite the challenges, there was definite commercial potential in this mad bubbly adventure. At home and abroad, devotees began to question publicly where the magical bubbles came from.

Aficionado Frederik William I of Prussia (father of Frederick the Great) went a step further and put this vexatious question to experts at the Berlin Science Academy, but when they asked for 40 bottles of his champagne to experiment with, he was outraged, roaring: "I have no need of them to drink my wine, and I prefer not to know all my life why it sparkles, rather than to deprive myself of a single drop!"

Champagne was introduced to Russia in 1724. Peter the Great soon insisted on taking four bottles to bed with him every night and, under the rule of his daughter, the Empress Elizabeth, sweet champagne took over from Tokay as the official drink for toasts.

Not much later, in a parody of modern-day seduction techniques, Catherine the Great, whose sexual appetite was legendary, would use bottles of champagne as 'Dutch courage' for her young officers before their close encounters. Every year, her field marshal Count Razumovsky would place orders for more than 100,000 bottles of champagne. It seems the Russian imperial family were all mad for champagne and drank like fish!

THE FIRST CHAMPAGNE HOUSES

OPPOSITE *The Oyster Lunch* (1735) by Jean François de Troy, one of two paintings commissioned by Louis XV to commemorate the pleasures of champagne.

“EFFERVESCENCE ... BELONGS RIGHTLY TO BEER, CHOCOLATE AND WHIPPED CREAM.”

– Adam Bertin de Rocheret

Correspondence from the 18th century indicates that the Champagne region's first great wine broker Adam Bertin de Rocheret absolutely hated wine with bubbles and even refused to stock it, except by special royal request. He proclaimed: “Effervescence is only a merit in a *petit vin* and belongs rightly to beer, chocolate and whipped cream.” How shortsighted indeed (luckily, his son Philippe-Valentin realised his father's mistake and later began pushing sales of sparkling champagne as hard as he could).

For obvious reasons, making champagne in that period was not a venture to be undertaken lightly. There was no way of measuring effervescence or controlling it, which meant that up to 90 per cent of the bottled wine could be lost through explosion before being shipped. No party had significant enough vineyard holdings to dominate the market (except the church) and no worker would dare enter any champagne cellar without wearing an iron mask for protection. Some even called champagne the ‘Devil's wine’ and yet spookily in some years, the wine wouldn't sparkle at all. Most brokers and merchants of the day agreed that sparkling champagne was altogether too dangerous to make and too expensive to be worth the effort. Fortunately for champagne lovers, certain merchants and vineyard owners saw the potential popularity and profitability of champagne and recognised that production could no longer be left in the hands of peasants.

In 1729, Nicolas Ruinart, an Épernay textile merchant, founded the first firm dedicated exclusively to champagne-making. Following a visit to the region in 1735, Voltaire gave sparkling champagne another great publicity boost when he joyfully wrote in *Le Mondain*: “*De ce vin frais a l'écume pétillante, De nos Français est l'image brillante*”, suggesting that the French national character is in fact mirrored by the brilliant sparkle of champagne. Although Louis XIV hated Voltaire, he was such a huge fan of champagne himself that in the same year, he ordered two paintings representing the pleasures of champagne for the informal Hunt Dining Room in his apartments at Versailles (*The Oyster Lunch* and *The Ham Lunch*).

In this hedonistic pre-revolutionary period, champagne's crowning glory was that its delicious feminine frothiness captured the imagination and purse strings of France's leading ladies, whose intelligent wit and good taste turned the debauched French royal court back into an intellectually advanced and civilised society (although sex was still in – the bottles of sparkling champagne were always opened, in a suggestive manner, by women). These provocative demimondaines proved themselves to be perfect successors to the L'Ordre des Côteaux.

In the 1730s, Claude Moët began making regular trips to the palace of Versailles and, within a short time, he had become one of only a handful of wine merchants accredited to the royal court. On one such trip, he was introduced to a bevy of gorgeous young women. Amongst the group that day was Louis's long-term favourite mistress, Madame de Pompadour, who had strong family links to the Champagne region and already understood the





OPPOSITE A portrait of Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XIV and Moët enthusiast, by Quentin de la Tour.

THIS PAGE *Fêtes champêtres* (champagne suppers) such as this one hosted by the Earl of Derby in an ornate supper room room designed by Robert Adam, were the rage on both sides of the channel during the reign of Louis XIV.



difference between sparkling and ordinary champagne. She loved Moët's wine and soon became one of his most valuable customers, ensuring that Moët's champagne was served at every important function at Versailles. She would often remark: "Champagne is the only wine that leaves a woman beautiful after drinking it."

This latest vogue resulted in the launch of several new champagne firms whose names would soon become world famous: Lanson, Roederer, Clicquot and Heidsieck. Moët loved celebrities, Ruinart made a specialty of servicing English dukes, and both Clicquot and Roederer were very focused on building the lucrative Eastern European market.

In 1764, when the Pompadour died, the King found consolation in champagne suppers (*fêtes champêtres* where plentiful amounts of sparkling champagne were supplied). He died of smallpox in 1774 and was succeeded by the immature Louis XVI, who was even more out of touch with reality. For example, bread, which had always been a staple of the French diet, began to rise steeply in price due to grain shortages. Rising prices eventually led to protests from hungry peasants. When told about the bread emergency, Louis's Austrian born wife Marie-Antoinette's suggestion was to: "Let them eat cake." On 14 July 1789, when Louis XVI heard the news that hordes of angry Parisians had overrun the despised Bastille prison, he innocently asked: "Is it a revolt then?" "No, Sire," came the reply, "it's a revolution."

Perhaps it's no surprise that when the royal couple tried to flee the country through Champagne, they were recognised and betrayed as they passed through the birthplace of Dom Pérignon.

CHAMPAGNE AND REVOLUTION

If the pomp and ceremony of the Bourbon dynasty put Champagne in the social spotlight, it was the ripple effect of more wars and military occupation following the French Revolution that ensured Champagne's crucial position at the centre of the international stage.

In 1780, a bottling of 6,000 bottles of champagne was still considered to be exceptional, but in the true entrepreneurial style that has always defined this brand, in that particular year Claude Moët dared to make 50,000 bottles of champagne. He had reason for optimism – exports to America, which had suffered during the War of Independence, had recovered by 1790, and George Washington was already a customer of Moët. Champagne was still hugely popular across the English Channel, despite successive kings and governments keeping legitimate wine sales down through heavy taxation until 1786. At last in 1800, George III approved an Act allowing French wines to be imported if shipped via the Channel Islands and so, finally, the many charms of champagne could once again be celebrated by famous gentlemen of the day such as the poets Sheridan and Byron. Fortunately, although France itself was in total turmoil and fighting battles on all sides, this did not in any way interfere with the status of champagne at home. In fact, the demise of the *ancien régime* actually brought new customers to the region. Nevertheless, champagne producers had to be extremely careful during this time. Many of their best existing customers were suddenly on France's most wanted list. Some wine-makers stayed up all night modifying bills and records to remove aristocratic titles and replace them with the appropriate *citoyen* (citizen's name). Fearing for their lives, members of



THIS PAGE Barrels of champagne on the docks in England. In 1728, Louis XV changed the wine law to allow champagne wine to be transported in bottles rather than casks.

OPPOSITE The Abbey of Hautvilliers and its vineyard, kept intact by order of the French Government.

France's oldest aristocratic families fled their estates and moved abroad, but the revolutionary tribunals still sipped on champagne as they sentenced to death those who remained. Some days, citizen traitors on their way to meet La Guillotine could be clearly heard singing: "*Vive L'Aÿ et la liberté!*"

Peasant wine growers had always had cause to resent the tax exemptions enjoyed by those champagnes made at the monasteries. Prior to the Revolution, church property had accounted for 50 per cent of all the vineyards in France. Noble and church land was now appropriated by the state and broken up into tiny parcels to be sold off at reasonable prices to citizen vignerons. Unfortunately, most vignerons did not have the resources to take advantage of this opportunity and many families were starving due to the national breakdown in food distribution. Some members of the wealthy merchant class living in Reims and Épernay were in a position to invest in this risky but potentially lucrative local industry, so various partnerships were formed during this tumultuous period. However, the government announced that there would be one French vineyard kept intact, that of the monastery at Hautvilliers where Dom Pérignon once worked. At the same time, champagne exports almost ground to a halt.

RISE OF THE CHAMPAGNE EMPEROR

The coming to power of Napoleon Bonaparte meant military blockades, battles and invasions, but it still initiated an extremely profitable growth spurt for champagne. Born into a poor wine-making family from Corsica, Napoleon had been sent to study at the prestigious

Royal Military Academy of Brienne, in Champagne, aged just nine years old. At first, he hated being the new face in town, but at least there were vineyards all around the school and later in life he would often fondly refer to Brienne as "my native land".

It was whilst studying here that the young Napoleon met a charming champagne salesman, Jean-Remy Moët, grandson of the original company founder, who made regular sales calls to the Academy of Brienne. Champagne advertising followed the army everywhere, so it was a good idea to build brand preference in youth. The dapper Moët was sophisticated and 11 years older than Bonaparte, but they were both very ambitious and shared similar values, so they soon formed a life-long friendship that served both.

Napoleon may have been considered a 'usurper of thrones' (he imposed French rule on Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands, Poland and even Spain), but he was also an extremely competent governor and instrumental in helping the new France reach her scientific potential. On the domestic front, he centralised administration, improved tax collection and made policing more efficient. The work of his agricultural ministers, Jean-Antoine Chaptal and Antoine-Augustin Parmentier, revolutionised the sugar industry (British naval blockades cut France's supply of cane sugar from the Caribbean, so Napoleon promoted sugar beet as a crop at home and made wine growers in the south subsidise the sugar beet farmers of the north). Thanks to 'chaptalisation', sparkling champagne was no longer the 'green' wine it had been during the 18th century and sugar could cover up a multitude of poor wine-making sins.

