



THE
WORLD'S
MOST ADMIRABLE
CHAMPAGNE
BRANDS 2024

DRINKS
INTERNATIONAL

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HOW WE DID IT

THE METHODOLOGY BEHIND THE VOTING SYSTEM

The voting for the 11th edition of *Drinks International's* annual Most Admired Champagne

Brands survey was conducted by a panel of industry experts. We polled leading sommeliers, retail buyers, wholesalers, bar managers, Masters of Wine, elite bartenders and specialist wine writers. Much like the other supplements in our Most Admired series, each academy member was asked to select the five brands they most admire in descending order.

The voters were advised to consider:

- The quality and consistency of the brand's champagne, paying particular attention to its flagship non-vintage expression, but also focusing on the entire range.
- The strength of the branding and marketing.
- The price-to-quality ratio across the range – does it justify its price point?
- How much they respect and admire the champagne house.
- How strong the brand is in relation to its peers within the champagne sector.

The brands featured on this list are all established, prestigious and widely available across the world. They have generally displayed high levels of consistent quality over a long period. However, our esteemed champagne expert Giles Fallowfield has identified the changes in the ranking, which is affected by the quality of vintages, marketing initiatives and other global affairs. Read on for his in-depth harvest report and profile of each house in our prestigious list.



WE POLLED
LEADING
SOMMELIERS,
RETAIL BUYERS,
WHOLESALEERS,
BAR MANAGERS,
MASTERS OF
WINE, ELITE
BARTENDERS
AND SPECIALIST
WINE WRITERS

1 LOUIS ROEDERER

LOUIS-ROEDERER.COM

This is the 10th year I have overseen and written the Most Admired Champagne Brands report and, in the second half of that decade, one brand has been notably dominant. Watching the votes come in over the past two months or so, it is the first time since 2019 – when Pol Roger topped the podium – that the brand in question wasn't a runaway winner.

But Roederer has, quite remarkably, managed to win the voting poll for a fifth year on the trot. The mixture of experimentation and consistent reinvention, striving for excellence, clever and subtle marketing and, most importantly, top-quality wines across the range, has been successful yet again in seducing the voting academy professionals.

The desire for excellence tied in with a lust for experimentation and reinvention is, it seems, what drives head winemaker Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon. Bring up any of the important viticultural issues Champagne is facing and it's likely Lécaillon will have been examining them, seeking solutions, and already putting in place a strategy to address them. With changing climate being the biggest challenge facing the Champenois today, Roederer has been at the forefront of addressing the myriad issues it is presenting each harvest.

It was largely in response to the changing climate that Lécaillon and chief executive Frédéric Rouzaud introduced the multi-vintage cuvée Collection 242 to replace the Brut Sans Année (BSA) blend Brut Premier created by Rouzaud's father, Jean-Claude. That new blend of 1986, with more reserve wine used, had itself been Rouzaud senior's solution to addressing the issue of creating a consistent and attractive BSA



blend each year, given some of the acid, underripe fruit picked in sun-starved harvests of the '70s and early '80s.

FURTHER DETAIL

Initially commentators were shown the new Collection 242 wine without an in-depth explanation of the trials which had helped create it. However, last July, with a further two Collection blends – 243 based on 2018 and 244 based on 2019 – released, and three more blended in the cellar, Lécaillon went into greater detail about the trials and how he gradually moved this blend towards his goal.

Lécaillon introduces his presentation, The Future of Champagne – the Art of Blending, by saying: “We are the generation with the unique chance to rewrite the rules because the climate is changing so fast. We now have earlier harvests and get riper and healthier fruit. It used to be picked at around 9.5° potential alcohol, now we get 10.5-11°. All the rules

we learned at school are irrelevant, we are having to relearn and question many things to create a champagne of freshness. To do this with a new multi-vintage blend we have lots of tools to help us. Two fermentations, malolactic or no malo, playing with the dosage, oak ... but first is the art of blending, it's a very strong tool for freshness, there is real resilience in multi-vintage blends.”

Lécaillon talks us through the four experimental, unreleased cuvées of Collection based on the 2013-2016 harvests, where he was in the process of adjusting

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the blend by playing with the percentage put through malolactic fermentation; the amount of oak fermentation; the percentage of the réserve perpetuelle in the blend; the proportion of oak réserve used and its age; plus the dosage level.

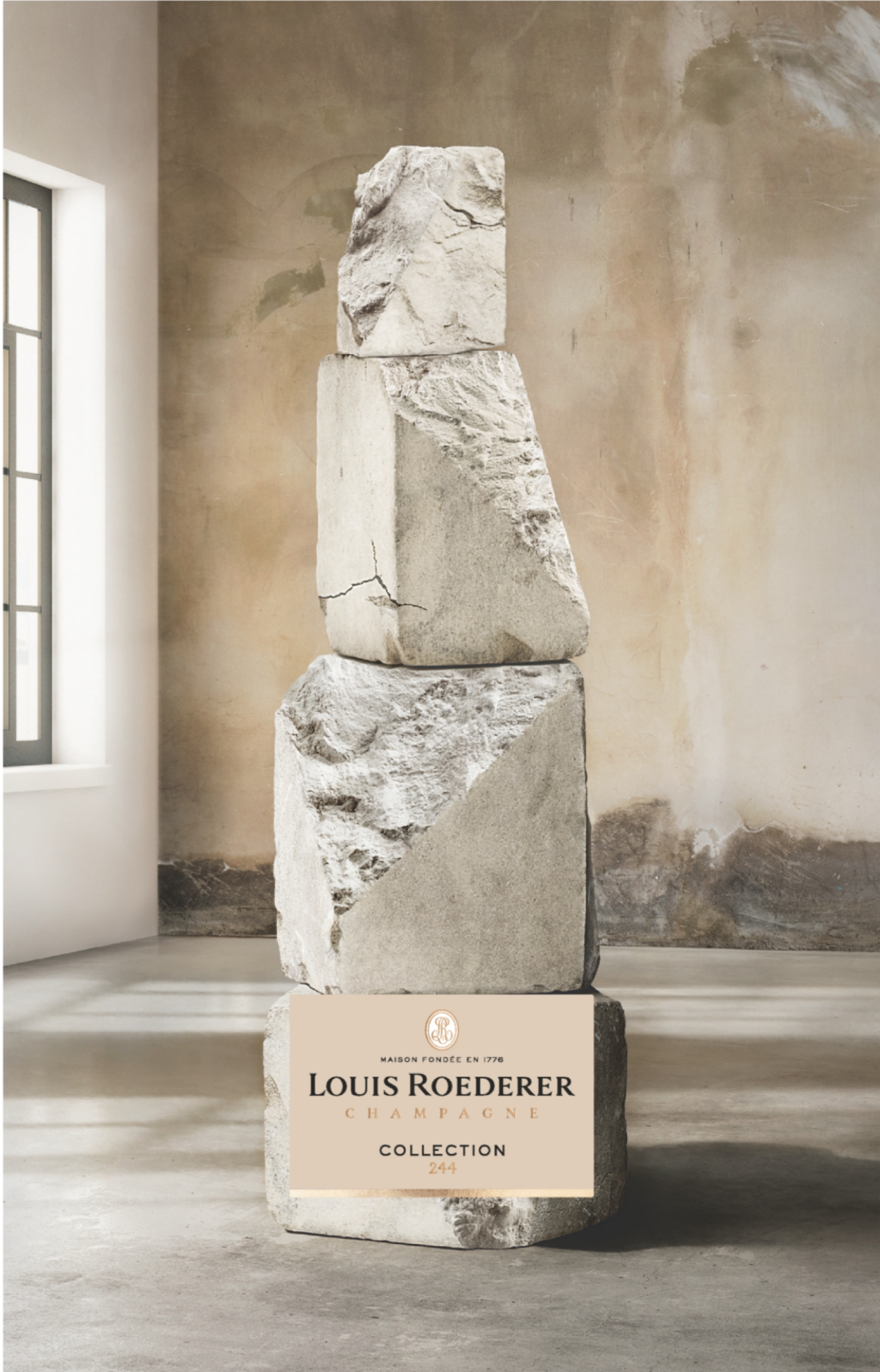
This is, of course, after you have already selected the precise proportion and exact sourcing – specific plots, not just crus – of the grapes used, approximately assembled as 40% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay and 20% Meunier.

Over four years we see the proportion of the wines put through malo come down; some second pressing (taille) of Pinot Noir introduced; the oak fermentation increased from about 12-16%; the role of the réserve perpetuelle – counterintuitively an important source of freshness – increased from 16% to around a third of the blend; and the age of the oak réserve element reduced from six to four years (gives a less oxidised style).

It's a complicated picture to follow, even with Lécaillon as guide, but an insight into the decisions made and the many options available. It took four harvest blends to make what he wanted and even then, with the 242 first release he feels there's not enough Pinot Noir taille or oak fermentation and the age of the oak réserve needs reducing. While they are not the same blends, as adjustments need making with every individual harvest, Lécaillon is happy with the proportion of elements in the blends for Collection 243 and 244.

That's not to say he won't look at, isn't already contemplating, introducing other elements. This is a perfectionist at work and he's 'experimenting' with Roederer's biggest-selling and arguably most important wine.

That's a big part of the reason it is still sitting at the top of the MACB pile. But the chasing pack is at least getting closer.



LOUIS ROEDERER
HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE