

BILLECART-SALMON

CHAMPAGNE-BILLECART.FR

Billecart-Salmon is one of the few significant family-owned champagne houses remaining. This year it has a 200th anniversary to celebrate,

along with its highest-ever ranking in the Most Admired Champagne Brands survey, up one place on last year.

Antoine Roland-Billecart, runs the company with his brother François,

representing the sixth generation of the family at the helm. He has set out the company's strategy for the next century, detailing how it has been investing in the future, both in the winery and by making small purchases of top quality vineyards.

"The goal is to have more Grand Cru vineyard, especially in Ambonnay, Verzy and Verzenay, which are all important Pinot Noir crus for the house, plus Chardonnay from Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and Avize."

In terms of production, he says, the family is happy to stay at the same level of around 2.5m bottles, but wants to upgrade the quality on the grape supply and the profile of the business. In the winery it is adding a further 25 80hl foudres of French (Seguin-Moreau and François Frères) and Stockinger Transylvanian oak for fermentation, which will all be installed in time for the 2018 harvest.

Antoine says the style of the Billecart wines was created by his father, Jean, who started working in the winery in 1947 and celebrated his 94th birthday last October. He was looking above all for freshness and elegance. "He was a pioneer in the cold settling of the must prior to the first fermentation and was one of the first to do this back in 1952." Jean still participates in the pre-tasting and blending of the wines. As Antoine puts it: "He has 70 harvests' experience to share."

It's this continuity, married to embracing the best bits of modern technology, that sets Billecart-Salmon apart from the pack.



KRUG

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Krug and Roederer are the only two brands which have stayed in the top five for the half decade we've run the Most Admired Champagne Brands supplement. Krug's careful sourcing, long ageing, complex assembly and specific production method, with fermentation taking place in small oak barrels, make for a particular and distinctive flavour profile.

Add in a direct family connection that goes back to the origins of the house – it's no accident that four of our top-five brands have an active family involvement in their operations – and you have a recipe for ongoing success.

The idea that all future releases of the flagship Grande Cuvée will have an edition number only really took hold last year. This development links all the way back to Joseph Krug in the 1840s and recognises the fact that collectors like to taste and compare different blends of Grande Cuvée.

Surely the positive outweighs the negative, where retailers almost inevitably champion blends based on known, high-quality vintages, as they did with the 164th Édition, based on the 2008 harvest and released in 2017.

Krug has also decided to show the Grande Cuvée based on the harvest of the appropriate year at the launches of new vintages. It did this with the impressive 2004, still youthful and tight in its 'luminous freshness', showing the 160th edition of Grande Cuvée alongside to memorable effect, delighting journalists and buyers at the launch.

It turns out that a bottle of this same, but unmarked, Grande Cuvée (160th edition) cellared in 2013, was consumed and greatly appreciated chez moi on Christmas Day. The identity of said bottle was kindly provided afterwards by Olivier Krug from the code 111011 on the shrunken cork, so it works for me too.

