

# To serve with honour

Tony Blair upset EU leaders by offering Welsh wine and the Queen insists on English fizz. So what is a diplomatic choice of Champagne to serve to visiting dignitaries at the state dinner when national pride is at stake, asks **Catharine Lowe**

**C**hristopher Meyer's memoirs, *DC Confidential*, continue to stir ripples on the otherwise impeccably starched surface of the diplomatic world. Few will forget his savage depiction of Tony Blair in a "pair of ball-crushingly tight dark-blue corduroys", or Jack Straw as an "empty suit, inexplicably tongue-tied".

Her Majesty's ambassadors must be wondering how one of theirs could be so indiscreet. Most of these pedigree civil servants spend their life going to extremes to avoid the kind of media publicity caused by this tell-all book. One can only imagine the hushed conversations and raised eyebrows over a diplomatically stiff drink or two.

Yet even a drink or two can be the cause of a political hiatus, as Tony Blair discovered at a European Union summit in Brussels, where he laid on Welsh white wine and English red for fellow leaders. Rather than leading to a rush of orders at Parva Farm Vineyard in Chepstow, the publicity backfired when Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, took it upon himself to send 24 bottles of Italian wine to the Swedish PM, saying it was "to help him recover from having to drink Welsh and English wine".

**FIT FOR A QUEEN: ENGLISH NYETIMBER AND POL ROGER GRACES TABLES AT ROYAL FUNCTIONS**



**Berlusconi sent 24 bottles of Italian wine to the Swedish PM to help him recover from having to drink Welsh and English wine at an EU summit**

In a possibly optimistic move to convince George Bush that global warming is an important issue, the British government served Louis Roederer's Quartet NV at the G8 summit in Scotland last year. If imbibing Californian fizz caused President Chirac to choke he didn't mention it, at least not in public, as this was shortly after his infamous comments to Chancellor Schroeder and President Putin about the "awful cooking" of the British, "second only to Finland".

And there have been no complaints to date about the Queen's penchant for serving the English sparkling Nyetimber on a number of occasions, including at the Millennium, the Queen Mother's 100th birthday and her own golden wedding anniversary. Buckingham Palace also makes forays across the Channel when the occasion requires, with Champagne Roederer, Pol Roger (Winston Churchill's favourite) and Bollinger all holding the Royal Warrant.

Not surprisingly, the French government sticks firmly to Champagne. A list of Francois Mitterand's state dinners (not including his infamous gluttonous last supper dining on the banned Ortolan), reveals a bias towards Louise Pommery, William Deutz, Laurent Perrier Cuvée Grand Siecle, Bollinger and Dom Pérignon.

France's former president also reserved Krug for dinner with Helmut Kohl, the German chancellor in 1987, Veuve Clicquot for the King and Queen of Jordan in 1986, Cristal Roederer 1985 for the President of the Republic of Senegal in 1992, and Dom Ruinart 1985 for the President of the Republic of China at dinner in 1994.

The French Embassy in Washington also serves only Champagnes. "We never serve sparkling wine at the Residence," states Philip Pernet, estate manager at the embassy. "Our first choice of Champagne is either Laurent-Perrier Brut or Mumm. Cordon Rouge Brut for our all our recep-