



3 POL ROGER

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his is the fourth year on the trot that Pol Roger has been placed among the top three brands of our annual survey. That's impressive consistency and it's exactly what the Most Admired Champagne Brands is set up to highlight. It's this dependability and a sort of understated class that helps it gather so many admirers, even among the other houses.

It's no surprise, therefore, that Pol continues to garner strong voting support from our international panel of buyers and experts, which includes many MWs. For those people who have a strong or working relationship with one particular brand, it's their natural default choice of fizz when with others in the trade, exactly because it is widely admired.

In terms of image it has cleverly built on its historical association with Sir Winston Churchill, whose famous quote "my tastes are simple, I'm easily satisfied with the best" has certainly not done the brand any harm, given his penchant for and dedication to drinking Pol's wines. And as the first of the nine champagnes that currently hold a Royal Warrant to receive this accolade – back in 1877 Pol has discreetly managed to feature in many of the UK royal family's special celebrations over the years, with Pol Brut Réserve being poured at two high-profile weddings in 2018, from magnum of course.

However, Pol's reputation isn't built on who drinks it, however celebrated they may be – it's built on the liquid in the bottle. Pol has long been a champion of vintage styles and its reputation for quality has leaned quite heavily on such wines in the





past, with a larger percentage of its production accounted for by vintage releases than most other producers.

While Brut Réserve has perhaps been overshadowed in the past by the consistently fine vintage offering, it has benefited from the extended investment in the winery's refurbishment that took place between 2001 and 2011. The goût anglais, so loved by customers in Britain – still its major export market – has not been lost, but on the evidence of recent tastings, there's an extra precision, freshness and depth that gives it a noticeable

lift. And as the ultimate calling card of any house, it is the Brut non-vintage style, whatever it is called, that is most widely consumed.

With all its vintage styles - Brut, Blanc de Blancs and rosé – now based on the lovely, harmonious 2012, the first vintage made in the new winery, Pol is also to be applauded for keeping its faith in the vintage category. Some other houses are downplaying this sector in favour of their prestige cuvée lines and, to a certain extent, upmarket non-vintage Blanc de Blancs, often priced at a similar level to vintage offerings but rarely boasting the same depth, complexity or ageing potential.

One of the great things about Pol Roger vintage is its longevity and the delightful way in which it tends to age. To celebrate the start of a new decade, a bottle of the 1998 Extra Cuvée de Réserve Chardonnay, aged in my own cellar for over a decade after release, was near a glorious,

richly aromatic peak but not showing any signs of tiredness.

Further evidence of just how long these wines will flourish came with a tasting last October of two of the ancient bottles from the last decade of the 19th century, found when Pol started building a new packaging facility on the Epernay site in January 2018, above where the cellars collapsed during a period of heavy rain in February 1900.

While the wines that were buried and thought lost came from between 1887 and 1898, and amounted to nearly half Pol's stock at the time estimated at around 1.5m bottles - those opened from the 23 found intact were believed to be from the harvests of either 1898 or 1897. With no sugar showing in analysis they were assumed to be wines undergoing their secondary fermentation and not yet disgorged. At that time they would have all been from a single harvest, so the equivalent of today's vintage wines, though the blend would have been largely Pinot Noir (80%) and around one-fifth Chardonnay, as it was mainly black grapes that were planted in the region then.

Pol's new cellarmaster Damien Cambres, who took over from Dominique Petit when he retired in March 2018, said that, while both wines had lost their fizz, they showed an amazing lively character. He likened the first to aged Cognac, with aromas of spice and vanilla, while the second bottle showed extraordinary freshness, citrus and exotic fruit notes.

Cambres, after a challenging start with the 2017 vintage that he worked with Petit, has had two extraordinary vintages to follow and both look likely to be serious wines, with long ageing potential that will keep Pol Roger vintage in the limelight for decades to come.

