



CHAMPAGNE

Charles  
de Cazanove

## FANATICAL *About Fizz*

.....  
AUSTRALIA'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH  
FRENCH CHAMPAGNE CONTINUES  
TO GROW WITH THE LATEST TRIO  
OF BUBBLES IN A BOTTLE TO ARRIVE  
MAKING AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT.  
.....

### MICHAEL HINCE

RESTAURANT Entrecote in Melbourne's salubrious South Yarra was the venue for the recent Champagne Charles de Cazanove launch in Australia.

Over lunch in the company of Champagne Dames, Champagne Jayne (Jayne Powell) and Champagne Dame (Kyla Kirkpatrick) Coles Liquor introduced the 19th century Reims-based Champagne House to the local audience.

Three Charles de Cazanove cuvees will initially be ranged at Vintage Cellars, First Choice Liquor and Liquorland - the Brut Tradition Tete de Cuvee NV (RRP \$55), a Brut Rosé (RRP \$65) and, in a distinctively-shaped bottle, a Brut Millesime 2007 (RRP \$75).

The exchange between the two effervescent Dames was, unlike the bubbly, restrained, thankfully sabres remained in their scabbards and there was no ceremonial sabrage. The atmosphere was cordial and both the conversation and the wine flowed with consummate ease as is the norm for such occasions.

Charles de Cazanove was founded in Avize in 1811 by Charles Gabriel de Cazanove and was once one of the favourite tipples of Edward VII. Since 2004 it has been part of the Rapeneau family's G.H.Martell & Co Group, currently the largest family-owned producer in Champagne, and the sixth largest overall. It is presently the fifth most popular champagne brand in France, with



France accounting for about half of all champagne sales valued at 4.7 billion euros (\$A7.45b) in 2016.

The House's fourth-generation winemaker Christophe Rapeneau was the 2017 International Wine Challenge's sparkling winemaker of the year. The family now owns 200ha of vines in 64 villages in the Champagne region. This gives them control of a very large percentage of the fruit that goes into their cuvees.

Given the quality of the wines tasted at the lunch, Rapeneau, a graduate in oenology from the University of Reims in 1983, obviously knows his craft. The wines displayed the structure that pinot noir brings, the finesse of chardonnay and the lively assertiveness pinot meunier adds to a blend.

France's 300 Champagne Houses are judged by the quality and consistency of their non-vintage wines; it's pivotal to their acceptance and global success.

Relative to the other wines, the Brut Tradition Tete de Cuvee NV (20 per cent chardonnay/40 per cent pinot noir/40 per cent pinot meunier), drank more like an aperitif blanc de blanc. Maybe it was the influence of the pinot meunier or perhaps it was my bias for the style coming through.

I was impressed by the Brut Rosé's freshness and bold middle palate, spicy red fruit and trace of quince on the lingering back palate, complemented by a hint of menthol on the finish.

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Hopefully the surge in the rosé category generally will boost rosé champagne sales. My local merchant's still rosé wine offering has gone from two products four years ago to 46. Encouragingly, initial sales of the Charles de Cazanove Brut Rosé, already on the market, have been better than expected and additional supplies are on the way. A happy result considering Rapeneau has a weakness for rosé champagne.

2014 was the dominant vintage in both Brut Tradition Tete de Cuvee NV and the Brut Rosé Tete de Cuvee. The Millesime 2007 was rich and opulent, with a creamy, lactic mouthful leading to a gentle chardonnay-dominant finish. It was served at optimum temperature, thus its tertiary characteristics were immediately apparent and continued to evolve from first sip to last. Underneath the creaminess were robust flavours, with the pinot noir's peacock's tail evident. A sort of iron fist of a wine in a velvet glove!

Having been on lees for nine years, the Millesime 2007's nutty, toffee and autolysis overtones shine through. I would expect to pay in excess of \$100 a bottle for wine of this finesse, thus at RRP \$75 it represents extremely good value.

When tasted double blind by Vintage Cellars tasting panel, which included Bob Paulinski MW, it came out top of the category. It should fly off the shelves, so expect to see a 1990s vintage cuvee on sale come Christmas this year.

Paulinski first encountered Charles de Cazanove in the US in 2016 and was



immediately impressed with the House's classic, elegant, rich style and the high proportion of reserve wines that go into their vintages. Also the G. H. Martell connection, both from a quality and business perspective, gave Paulinski the confidence to bring Charles de Cazanove to Australia.

While I'm wary of extolling the virtues of any wine on a single tasting, especially in the presence of its makers and marketers, I share Paulinski's enthusiasm for the three Charles de Cazanove cuvees we tasted.

Launching a newcomer on the Aussie market is no easy task. From afar Australia appears to be an attractive, lucrative market for champagne. Our infatuation with champagne has blossomed over the last decade or so. In 1999 we consumed 1.69 million bottles, rising to 2.03 million bottles by 2009, and swelling to 6 million-plus bottles in 2013. By 2015 corks were popping aplenty when consumption peaked at a staggering 8.11 million bottles.

Last year Australia was the seventh largest champagne market worldwide and fifth largest in terms of bottles drunk per person. Yet despite this buoyancy it's not all roses.

According to Tyson Stelzer "the per-bottle spend in Australia is already one of the lowest in the world, the vast majority of which is non-vintage entry level wines of the big houses". In addition the dominant retailers directly import large quantities which retail for as little as \$25 a bottle.

Then there's the problem of parallel importing which takes place when, for example, a retailer sources wine internationally from a supplier other than the usual distributor and imports it without using middlemen. Often the wine may have been surplus stock from a regular importer who over ordered, an obvious win for consumers but not for the distributors or the reputation of the brands involved, especially if handling has been compromised.

Also there's a challenge evident from the emerging popularity of the

small, independent growers as outlined in the recent Bursting Bubbles book, by Bibendum's Robert Walters, though this is more apparent in the on- premise market than in the retail one. However these small-grower champagne supplies are limited and constitute but a short-term irritant to the dominant, big-brand houses with their huge marketing budgets.

And, in the long-term, these bespoke, small grower champagnes may well be beneficial in that they are likely to encourage consumers to trade up to rarer and aged vintages from the big houses - thus less is more and everybody wins!

Also, small growers invariably disclose the disgorgement date on their back labels, a welcome and long overdue initiative many a traditional Champagne House would do well to invoke, especially for the non-vintage cuvees.

I'm not sure what the modern-day Champagne Dames thought of Charles de Cazanove, though I noticed Champagne Jayne in animated conversation, in fluent French, with de Cazanove's export director Jean-Remy Rapeneau, so can only assume the bubbles were to her liking.

Time will tell, however I think the softly spoken, adroit Paulinski and all at Charles de Cazanove, especially the winemaker Christophe Rapeneau, will be well pleased come Christmas 2018.

Page 30: Cazanove advert from 1960. Exterior of the Charles de Cazanove building. Harvest vineyard of Cazanove.  
Page 32: Harvest and vineyard of Cazanove.  
Above: Christophe Rapeneau chief winemaker of Cazanove, 4th generation.

