



Feature

Celebrating with Champagne

By Patricia Valicenti

Champagne with a view at the Bar Windo in the Hyatt Regency Paris Etoile Hotel

As the holiday season settles in talk turns to one of the most festive of libations, champagne, a decidedly French affair, for champagne is made from grapes grown on a group of select hillsides and slopes, the vast majority of which are concentrated in the French department of the Marne, in and around the cities of Reims and Epernay. For it was here in eastern France that three centuries of labour by men and women turned a cold, humid landscape of relatively poor soil of almost pure chalk, responsible for champagne's distinctive taste, into a world-famous beverage synonymous with celebration. The great champagne houses continue to innovate while the French capital is peppered with fabulous spots to enjoy champagne or champagne-based cocktails.

G.H. Mumm & Cie was founded in 1827 but it is skyrocketing into the 21st century with its pioneering spirit with its latest objective being space. After three years of research, development and experimentation, the house has created Mumm Grand Cordon Stellar, the first champagne destined to be savoured in space. Working with a team of experts, engineers, researchers, designers, astronauts and oenologists, the result is champagne that comes out of the bottle in a frothy foam that was tasted and tested in a weightlessness fly over of the vineyards around Reims. But for mere earthlings, the house's singular and always refreshingly consistent Cordon Rouge remains a classic, a savant blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier grapes then aged for three years. Another enticing choice would be the Cordon Rouge Brut Millésime (vintage) 2012 with a high percentage of Pinot Noir grapes



The installation work by Pablo Valbuena at the Pommery
Experience show in the spectacular stairway leading into the chalk cellars

emanating from the Grand Crus of the Montagne de Reims, blended with a touch of Chardonnay.

Laurent-Perrier is also reaching for the stars with its limited edition Cuvée Rosé Constellation in a splendid bottle that evokes the evening sky. This is one of the great pink champagnes with its deep raspberry colour and its fresh taste and red fruit aromas. The house's Cuvée Rosé was created in 1968 and is marked by its unique grape variety for it is 100 per cent Pinot Noir.

Meanwhile, for a totally unusual champagne experience, you can explore the spectacular chalk cellars of the house of **Pommery** in Reims. For the 14th time the cellars are welcoming a Pommery

Experience, a show devoted to contemporary art in the various alcoves and tunnels of the house's extensive, deep and working cellars, a journey into a mysterious labyrinth, which comes alive with diverse works of art. A sculpture in the palest of green blue looking like something out of a sea of Poseidon rubs shoulders with champagne bottles that are quietly ageing away while in one alcove, installation works look down over a 14th century statue of the Virgin Mary. The show, curated by Hugo Vitrani of the Palais de Tokyo, presents some 20 international artists from various generations and working in myriad mediums ranging from video, to drawings, to sculpture and installation works. The Pommery guides are especially trained to guide you through the exhibition as well as the activities of the cellar. And after, once you come out of the cellars and the Pommery experience, you



The vineyards of G.H. Mumm with the windmill of Verzenay in the background (left) and the vineyards of Pinot Meunier grapes on the northern slopes of the Montagne de Reims for the production of Champagnes Ch. de l'Auche (right)

can enjoy a glass of refreshing champagne as part of the tour.

While champagne is made from the fermented and re-fermented juice of largely Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes, the Pinot Meunier variety, the only grape variety that is indigenous to the region, is at times a forgotten cousin although it can impart a subtle taste of candied fruit and spices into the champagne. And rare are the champagnes made entirely with Pinot Meunier. Enter some 60 wine growers of the great wine-producing region of the northern slopes of the Montagne de Reims who have come together supplying 40 different crus or wines since the early 1960s to produce prestigious champagnes at the Janvry cellar. The result being the champagnes Ch. de l'Auche with its Cuvée du Chapitre, a Blanc de Meunier, a sensational find composed entirely of Pinot Meunier grapes proffering a powerful champagne that remains surprisingly fresh and fruity.

Founded in 1729, **Ruinart** is regarded as the oldest of the Champagne houses. The 8-metre long cellars descending an astonishing 38 metres into the ground are reminiscent of a cathedral and offer ideal

conditions for ageing sparkling wines. The Ruinart champagnes are characterised by the Chardonnay grape variety, a rare, complex and fragile variety. And while the house's Blanc de Blancs is a quintessential classic, the house produces a fine range of rosés as well with the Ruinart Rosé blending 55 per cent Pinot Noir grapes with 45 per cent Chardonnay and then there is the ultimate vintage Dom Ruinart Rosé 2004 with a delicate touch of wild strawberry aroma.

Champagnes find their way to the finest of tables and wine cellars in Paris, too. A delightful champagne experience is underway in Paris at the **Hôtel Plaza Athénée**, which is welcoming a fabulous cellar of Dom Pérignon champagnes in its bar. Some 60 rare Dom Pérignon white and rosé champagnes are waiting to be tasted including the P2, the second plénitude that was elaborated over 16 years and the P3, the third plénitude that was elaborated over 25 years.

A bar devoted to champagne and cocktails and with a spectacular view out onto Paris has also opened, sitting up at 140 metres over Paris on the 34th floor of the **Hyatt Regency Paris Etoile**. The venue, the Bar



The Cuvée du Chapitre made from 100% Pinot Meunier grapes from the Champagnes Ch. de l'Auche



G.H. Mumm's 2012 vintage champagne



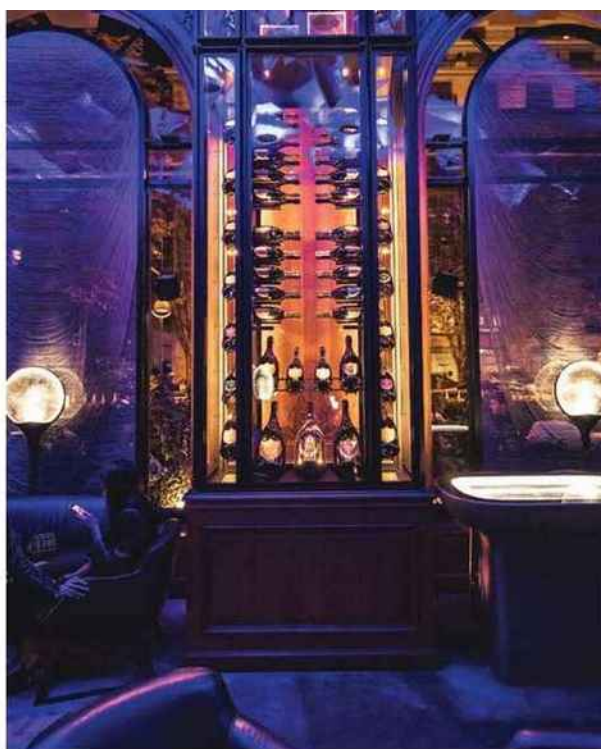
G.H. Mumm's eternal classic, the Cordon Rouge



Ruinart's Rosé, an evergreen classic



Laurent-Perrier's dreamy Cuvée Rosé Constellation



Dom Pérignon champagne is being showcased at the bar of the Hôtel Plaza Athénée (left), and the Esperanza Margarita cocktail at the La Mezcaleria Bar in the 1K Paris Hôtel (right)

Windo, offers a fabulous setting to sip, for example, the Mistinguett, one of the three champagne cocktails on offer and made with Parisian gin, jasmine, gentian and champagne.

Meanwhile, you can enjoy champagne at the **Relais du Parc** restaurant in the Renaissance Hotel Trocadero during its Sunday brunch with a fine view out on to the establishment's interior garden. And for a small extra price to the prix fixe brunch the experience becomes one filled with unlimited champagne, dubbed the Bubble Brunch, to accompany for example, the smoked salmon, salmon gravlax and prime rib that are all stars on the buffet along with eggs and a host of homemade desserts. The establishment also carries a fine selection of Laurent-Perrier champagnes.

You can savour a vintage champagne cocktail made in the unique setting of the **Bar 1802** of the Hôtel Monte Cristo. A genuine curiosity cabinet welcomes visitors and guests and the bar transmits a 19th century atmosphere of explorers, adventurers and exploration. You can sip the very venerable and delightful Old Cuban Wilmore, here a

melange of fine rum, Taittinger champagne, lemon, Angostura Bitters, grapefruit juice, cherry liquor and fresh mint, offers an excellent remedy for the long and dark days of winter.

The atmosphere-filled and Parisian temple to mescal, **La Mezcaleria bar**, secretly tucked away inside the 1K Paris Hôtel offers a fine selection of cocktails including the Esperanza Margarita a savant mix of tequila, grapefruit, gentian, agave, lime and Veuve Cliquot champagne or you can alternatively savour the Veuve Cliquot on its own.

The **Nysa wine shops in Paris**, which are specialised in wines and champagnes from independent growers and vintners are offering a unique champagne experience in all of their boutiques on December 14th, 15th and 16th. For the seventh time they will be holding their Bonheur des Bulles (Happiness of Bubbles) champagne tastings. In each wine boutique a champagne producer will be on hand to offer tastings and explanations of his or her champagne.

ADDRESS BOOK

BAR WINDO

Hyatt Regency Paris Etoile
3 Place du Général Koenig (17th),
01 40 68 51 31

DOMAINE POMMERY

5 Place Général Gouraud, 51100 Reims,
03 26 61 62 56
Reservations are required for the visit

BAR 1802

Hôtel Monte Cristo
20-22 rue Pascal (5th), 01 40 09 09 09

HOTEL PLAZA ATHENEE

25 ave Montaigne (8th),
01 53 67 66 65

LA MEZCALERIA

1K Paris Hôtel
13 blvd du Temple (3rd),
01 42 71 77 15

RELAIS DU PARC

Renaissance Trocadero Hotel
55-57 ave Raymond Poincaré (16th),
01 44 05 66 66

NYSA WINE CELLARS

FOR CHAMPAGNE TASTINGS

December 14th starting at 4pm
103 rue des Pyrénées (20th)
01 43 71 98 68
December 15th starting at 11am
95 rue Saint Antoine (4th)
01 40 29 02 56
December 16th starting at 11am
39 rue des Martyrs (9th)
01 40 16 80 27
Full programme at www.nysa.fr