

## First taste: Champagne Bollinger RD 2007

Simon Field MW enjoys a preview of Bollinger RD 2007, the Champagne house's latest RD release, and explores the history and ageing potential of the cuvée characterised by extended lees ageing



Simon Field MW  
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The bronze bust of Lilly Bollinger looked on approvingly as we entered the inner sanctum of Maison Bollinger, albeit by Zoom, to experience the latest in the series of RD wines which she initiated in 1967, with the launch of the first vintage (1952).

At the time, the concept was shocking and counter-intuitive, not least the mere six grams of sugar by way of *dosage*. The norm then was closer to 20g/L. With this latest release, the 2007, it is 3g/L, putting the wine firmly in the Extra Brut camp.

This is the 26th release of RD, which is always a vintage of Grand Année that has been held back and given extended ageing on lees in the Bollinger cellar – 14 years, compared to seven years for the Grand Année.

The initials RD stand for ‘*récemment dégorgé*’, or ‘recently disgorged’. The company closely guards the amount made in any given vintage, but both the vintages are rare and quantities are small.

The *raison d’être* behind RD chimes perfectly with the Bollinger house philosophy, namely the creation of a supremely elegant yet magisterially powerful wine, a wine able to rise to the challenge of extended lees ageing.

There is not, as yet, a third ‘*plénitude*’, à la Dom Pérignon, but who knows: the wine seems to age in such a magnificently mysterious fashion, that there could always be an argument for taking the next step.

### **Ageing potential**

By way of demonstration, the deputy cellar master Denis Bunner, who was joined in the presentation by Bollinger’s general manager, Charles-Armand de Belenet, had sent over two ‘mystery bottles’ to accompany the RD 2007.

What could they be? Hard to say, but one thing was clear: the cork of sample one was almost impossible to pull! Some resorted to garden implements, or worse – all was ultimately well worth the effort and all completely fascinating; it turned out that both bottles were from 1976 (older readers may well remember the endless summer that year), but one had been disgorged in 2020, the other in 2014. Counterintuitively, the more recent disgorgement initially tasted fully mature, almost maderised, beguilingly so, and the older disgorgement was whistle-fresh, with flinty acidity and inordinate complexity immediately evidenced. A mere 30 minutes later, although not quite a reversal of fortune, it was extraordinary to witness the rejuvenation of the first sample, now alarmingly fresh and completely delicious. Sadly neither wine is commercially available.

### **New label design**

The 2007 RD is made up of 70% **Pinot Noir**, dominated by fruit from Verzenay (usually Aÿ takes the lead), and 30% **Chardonnay**, sourced mainly from Cramant.

In youth the style plays on poise and tension, the sheer power latent yet never far away. The fruit is sourced from 14 key vineyards (sometimes this number goes up to 25), 91% of which are grand cru. The wine has been fermented in barrel, aged on natural cork for the 14-year period, and then disgorged in July 2021, the date clearly inscribed on the front label, which has been redesigned using the original aluminium alloy and same lettering as for the 1952.

The **2007 vintage in Champagne** was perceived as somewhat lacklustre by some, its harvest brought in relatively early in September after welcome sunshine in late July and August. Some may have questioned whether it was even a year to contemplate an RD release, yet Bollinger – with characteristic verve and undeniable panache – has produced an outstanding wine, a little more reserved than some maybe, but with plenty to give over the medium-to-long term.