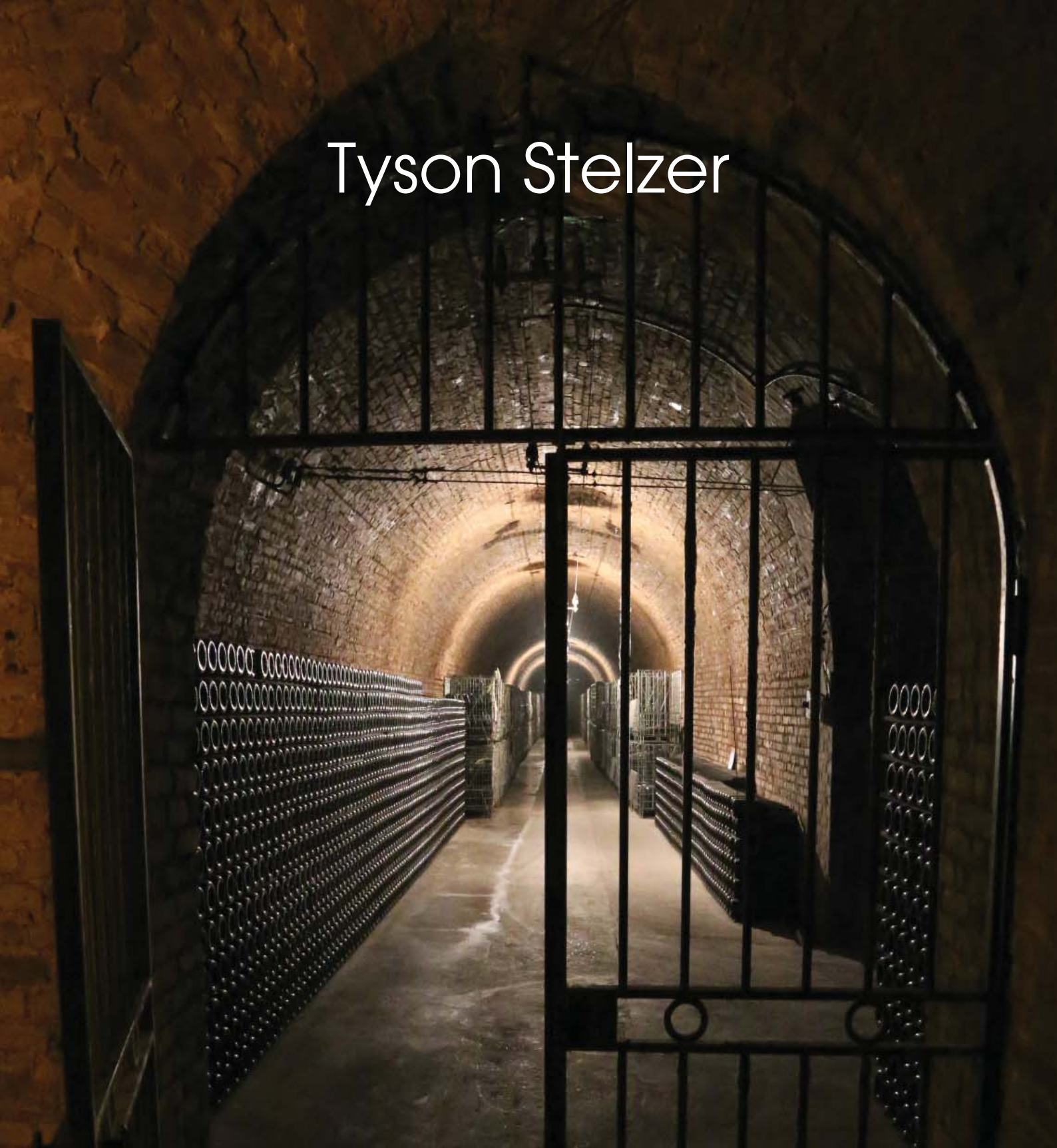
Tyson Stelzer



what champagne houses don't want you to know

how to crack the champagne code

the code breaker's guide to unlocking champagne

Champagne is the most guarded wine region on earth and one of its biggest secrets is beginning to get out.

The age of a bottle of non-vintage champagne has long been a mystery. It's been impossible to distinguish from the label a fresh, young bottle from a stale one, to track a collection in the cellar, to identify one batch or bottling from another and, most significantly, to choose a blend based on a great vintage rather than one marked by a lesser season.

A new day is dawning in the convoluted world of champagne communication and many smaller producers and even some larger houses are now beginning to disclose the age of their non-vintage bottlings.

The two most useful time stamps for a non-vintage cuvée are the date of bottling (almost always the year following the base vintage) and the date of disgorgement, when the bottle leaves the cellar to receive its cork (usually between a few months and a year before it is shipped).

There are rumours that the CIVC, guardian of Champagne's regulatory requirements, is contemplating mandating disgorgement dates on back labels. Until this happens, decoding this information is not always straightforward, since there is no standard for declaring dates.

Those houses that do kindly volunteer this information use all manner of systems, hidden in difficult to read bottling codes etched into the glass of the bottle, printed on the neck label or the back label, printed in plain English or French on back labels, coded on front labels or corks, or accessed via QR codes, ID codes, web sites or dedicated apps.

In *The Champagne Guide 2016-2017*, I explain how to crack the code for every grower and house who have volunteered their system. The following list offers a complete summary so you can quickly decode the next bottle you buy.

More champagne houses and growers are adding this information to their bottles, so if you spot one not yet in my list, please email the details to stelzer@winepress.com.au and I'll add it.

In the meantime, this code breaker's guide will equip you with everything you need to find the freshest bottles on the shelves. For full detail on each house and cuvée, visit ChampagneHQ.com or pick up a copy of *The Champagne Guide 2016-2017*.

Santé!

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Agrapart

Disgorgement dates aren't printed on back labels, but they're easy to decode from the cork. The number is the year of disgorgement, and the letter is the month (A for January, B for February, and so on).

Ayala

Disgorgement dates are printed on the back of every bottle.

Benoît Lahaye

Disgorgement date, dosage and assemblage are printed on the back of every cuvée.

Bérèche et Fils

Back labels of all cuvées are impressively informative, disclosing dosage, disgorgement date and base vintage.

Boizel

Back labels declare the blend and disgorgement date.

Bollinger

Disgorgement dates are not stamped on non-vintage bottles (they are on the vintage wines). Labelling occurs shortly after disgorgement, so the labelling date provides a good indication. The first two digits of the labelling code on the neck of Special Cuvée and Rosé are the year and the next three digits are the number of the day of that year, so L1405002 means the 50th day of 2014. The letter on the cork is the month of disgorgement and the number is the year, so 4A is January 2014.

Bruno Paillard

Bruno Paillard was the first in Champagne to publish the disgorgement date on every bottle — more than controversial when he set out in 1983.

Camille Savès

Savès' attention to detail is exacting, right down to laser etching disgorgement dates on every bottle.

Charles Heidsieck

The back labels of Brut Réserve are now some of the most informative among champagne houses, detailing bottling and disgorgement dates, base vintage, proportion of reserve wines and number of crus in the blend. From the next release, all other Charles Heidsieck cuvées will follow suit.

Couche Père et Fils

Back labels are particularly informative, detailing vintages, dosage and disgorgement dates.

De Sousa & Fils

Disgorgement dates, bottling dates and dosages are printed on every bottle. The base vintage of NV cuvées is always the year prior to the bottling date.

Devaux

Since September 2014 the bottling code laser etched on to the bottle reveals the final digit of the base vintage prefixed by “LYD”. For instance, LYD0 denotes base vintage 2010 and LYD6, 2006. The disgorgement month and year are also laser etched, prefixed with “D Le”.

Dumangin J. Fils

For champagnes disgorged to order, back labels are impressively informative, disclosing disgorgement date, blend and dosage. Each disgorgement now receives a unique QR code to provide a great depth of information, including disgorgement date, blend, reserve wines, vineyards, food matches, reviews and importer’s details.

Egly-Ouriet



Back labels are among Champagne’s most informative, declaring disgorgement dates, terroirs and number of months on lees. Wines are bottled in July following harvest, so it’s easy to determine the base vintage.

Fleury Père & Fils

While disgorgement dates are printed on every bottle, they’re not always easy to read. Labelling dates are printed much more clearly. Labelling generally occurs one to six months after disgorgement.

Francis Boulard

Cuvées are disgorged every month, and back labels declare the blend, percentages of vintages, bottling and disgorgement dates and dosage.

G.H. Mumm

Mumm now prints bottling and disgorgement dates on the back labels of its de Cramant, Blanc de Blancs and Blanc de Noirs, as well as its Brut Selection for the French market. The base vintage is the year prior to bottling.

Gaston Chiquet

Every bottle is labelled with its disgorgement date on the back label.

Geoffroy

Vintages, varieties, dosage and date of disgorgement are now displayed on the back of every label, a laudable commitment for a small grower who disgorges every 2–3 months and tweaks the dosage for each disgorgement.

Georges Laval

Impressively informative back labels declare vintages, blends, disgorgement dates and dosage levels.

H. Billiot Fils

Disgorgement dates are now declared on back labels.

J. Lassalle

The bottling code laser-etched on every cuvée is the disgorgement date.

Jacques Selosse

Labels are impressively informative, detailing disgorgement dates, dosage, blends and often the base vintage.

Jacquesson

Back labels are among the most informative of any champagne house, shamelessly declaring disgorgement date, dosage, base vintage, blend and even precise production quantities. There are no secrets here.

Jérôme Prévost La Closerie

Bottles are not vintage dated, but the year of harvest is coded in the fine print of the front label, beginning ‘LC’.

Krug

In 2012, Krug introduced an ingenious ID code above the barcode of every bottle. Using this code, Krug.com and the Krug app reveal the season and year in which the bottle was shipped, the number of years over which it has aged, the blend and the vintage story for vintage wines, and the number of wines and each of the vintages in non-vintage blends. This code also reveals the disgorgement date on the spot, since the first three digits are the trimester (first digit) and year (second and third digits) of disgorgement.

Laherte Frères

Each bottle boasts a refreshingly informative back label, detailing villages, assemblage, vinification, dosage and disgorgement date.

Lanson

Lanson is impressive in printing disgorgement dates on the back of every cuvée and its new website is refreshingly informative, with technical sheets detailing blends and villages for every cuvée.

Larmandier-Bernier

Bottling codes are easy to decode, with the last four digits denoting the month and year of disgorgement. The other digits in the code are the base year.

Louis Roederer

In a fantastic development in disclosure, Louis Roederer’s website and app now reveal the base vintage, year of bottling and year of disgorgement from the bottling code of any cuvée.

Marguet

Benoît Marguet has printed disgorgement dates on back labels since 2009, among the first in Champagne to do so.

Michel Loriot

Disgorgement date, cépage and dosage are detailed on the back label of every cuvée.

Moët & Chandon

Disgorgement date, dosage and blend are clearly displayed on the back label of vintage cuvées – impressive detail for a house of this magnitude. The digits on the front label of MCIII are the batch number and disgorgement year, so 001.14 denotes the first batch, disgorged in 2014.

Pascal Doquet

Back labels are informative, declaring disgorgement date, dosage, base vintage and percentages of reserves.

Paul Déthune

Disgorgement dates are printed on the back of every bottle.

Philipponnat

Some of the most informative back labels of any house declare the date of disgorgement, the blend, barrel maturation and dosage; the house claims to be the first in Champagne to also indicate the base year of its blends. An excellent new website adds more informative detail on every cuvée.

Pierre Gimonnet

Disgorgement dates are printed on bottles sent to countries that request them, including the US and Italy.

Piper-Heidsieck

The back label of Piper-Heidsieck Essential Cuvée Brut NV refreshingly features back vintage, reserves, dosage and bottling and disgorgement dates.

Pol Roger

The bottling code of Brut Réserve indicates the packaging date, with the first digit denoting the year, and next three digits the day of that year.

Taittinger

Since mid-2014, all cuvées except Comtes de Champagne have boasted a QR code that reveals the bottling and disgorgement dates. I'm told there's also a way to locate this information on the website, but I couldn't find it.

Tarlant

All cuvées have boasted informative back labels since 2000, detailing terroirs, cépages, vintages, disgorgement and bottling dates and dosage.

Ulysse Collin

Back labels declare base vintages and disgorgement dates.

Veuve Clicquot

After much anticipation, I'm delighted Clicquot has introduced QR codes on its Cave Privées and La Grande Dame, hoping to roll these out across its full range, to reveal disgorgement dates, blends and dosages.

Veuve Fourny & Fils

Back labels have been updated to feature impressive detail, including disgorgement date, terroirs, cépage, vinification, assemblage, dosage and even the type of cork.

Vilmart & Cie

A new labelling system prints the cépage and disgorgement date on the back of every bottle.

Vincent Charlot

Informative back labels declare the disgorgement date, cépage, vine age, proportion of barrel fermentation and dosage of each cuvée.