

A historic moment
for Maison Perrier-Jouët





As Cellar Master Hervé Deschamps transmits its enduring heritage of savoir-faire to Séverine Frerson

The transmission from one cellar master to the next is a key event for any champagne house, but for Maison Perrier-Jouët, which has had just seven cellar masters in over 200 years, it is truly a historic moment. In October 2020, Séverine Frerson will become the eighth cellar master – and the first woman to hold the position – in the history of the House, which was famously founded from the union of Pierre-Nicolas Perrier and Rose-Adélaïde Jouët in 1811.

She succeeds Hervé Deschamps, whose retirement brings to an end a transition period during which he and Séverine Frerson have worked side by side, welcoming wine critics, sommeliers and friends of the House, touring international markets, tasting the rare cuvées in the Oenothèque Perrier-Jouët, and blending the wines from the 2019 harvest, which promises to be an excellent year.

Along with the historic cellar books containing the notes and observations of all his predecessors, and the key to the legendary Eden cellar, where the most precious vintages are kept, Hervé Deschamps will hand over to his successor the responsibility for perpetuating the unique intricate floral style of Maison Perrier-Jouët – and for taking it forward into the future.

Hervé Deschamps

“Keeping Perrier-Jouët where it belongs”

For the retiring cellar master, this is a particularly poignant moment, evoking memories of the close relationship he forged with his own predecessor, André Baveret, who spotted his talent and encouraged him to develop it. He vividly remembers the older man’s parting advice, when he left Hervé Deschamps in sole charge back in 1993: “Keep Perrier-Jouët where it belongs. It’s easy to make good wines with good grapes.”

Easy – probably not, but Hervé Deschamps has certainly kept Maison Perrier-Jouët right at the forefront of champagne houses, and indeed enhanced its renown in many ways. It is a legacy he can look back upon with pride, particularly since he has roots deep in the limestone soils of the Champagne region. “My grandparents were winegrowers in the Côte des Blancs,” he recalls. “I loved to help my grandfather with the vines and taste the grape juice fresh from the press at harvest time. My attachment to the land and my passion for champagne were formed early on.”

Hervé Deschamps joined Maison Perrier-Jouët at the age of 26, following his military service and studies in oenology at the University of Dijon. He recalls being received by André Baveret in his office, where the smell of wine always lingered – his first encounter with the man who would become his mentor. He credits André Baveret with instilling in him the visionary dimension of a cellar master’s expertise. “In the beginning, I had what you might call a ‘Burgundy sensibility’ – a preference for rich, mellow wines,” he explains. “André Baveret transformed this, tasting after tasting, into an instinct for champagne, teaching me to look for the lightness and finesse without which the evolution of the wine is inevitably limited.”

While his sensibility for the Perrier-Jouët style was honed over many years, in another key respect Hervé Deschamps was already a perfect fit, sharing a life-long love of botany with the founders of the House. The unaffected ease and laser-like precision with which he describes each Perrier-Jouët cuvée in terms of specific flowers and fruit draws on his encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject. A keen gardener, he takes pride in cultivating two varieties of Japanese anemone, one pink, one white, the latter the very flower represented by the Art Nouveau master Emile Gallé on the bottles of Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque.





An important dual legacy

What Hervé Deschamps has also cultivated, during his career with Maison Perrier-Jouët, is an entirely new dimension of the cellar master's role – that of ambassador – which has become a blueprint for many champagne houses. crisscrossed the globe, significantly raising the international profile of the House, as his natural sociability and passion for his craft have enabled him to connect with wine experts and amateurs beyond the barriers of language and culture.

If this can be described as Hervé Deschamps' immaterial legacy, he leaves a material legacy that is equally impressive, notably two emblematic cuvées: vintage Perrier-Jouët Belle Époque Blanc de Blancs and classic Perrier-Jouët Blanc de Blancs.

Together, they crystallise the House's historic savoir-faire in revealing the quintessence of Chardonnay, the white grape variety chosen by the founders as their signature. Sourced from two small parcels of vines within Cramant, one of the most prestigious Grand Cru villages in the Côte des Blancs, Perrier-Jouët Belle Époque Blanc de Blancs is the sublime expression of a single grape variety, a single terroir and a single year – a champagne shimmering with golden light, whose freshness and purity are the exhilarating prelude to an explosion of lush floral notes.

In 2017, Hervé Deschamps completed the classic collection with Perrier-Jouët Blanc de Blancs, a vibrant, spontaneous champagne overflowing with aromas of tangy citrus and hedgerow flowers.

Landmark moments

Hervé Deschamps is also the cellar master who represented Maison Perrier-Jouët at landmark moments in its history, not least its 200th anniversary in 2011.

In the run-up to the bicentenary, he gathered the world's leading wine critics around a "verticale" tasting of vintage cuvées spanning almost two centuries, which revealed the remarkable consistency of the Perrier-Jouët style.

The culmination was the tasting of the 1825 vintage, bottled by the founders and thought to be the oldest champagne in the world.

Hervé Deschamps recalls the intense emotion of raising the glass to his lips and the utter amazement of discovering the finesse and elegance of this legendary cuvée, which amply compensated for the difficulty he had in removing the cork!

Last but not least, Hervé Deschamps was the initiator, in 2008, of Perrier-Jouët By & For, the exceptional experience resulting in the creation of an entirely bespoke champagne capturing the personality and preferences of a chosen individual. The concept, recently renamed Bespoke, was inspired by Maison Perrier-Jouët's tradition of personalisation, which began with Charles Perrier, the son of the founders, who tailored cuvées to the tastes of his customers. In this, as in many other respects, Hervé Deschamps has not only perpetuated the heritage of the House, but also added a new dimension – a mission that now falls to his successor.





Séverine Frerson

A woman at the pinnacle of her profession

Passion. Memory. Intuition. For Séverine Frerson, these three words have an almost talismanic significance.

Passion, first of all – a passion for wine, which led her, when she was barely 15, to choose oenology as her future career... and to stick by her decision in defiance of those who told her it was a man's world.

That same passion – not to mention a fair measure of talent and determination – has seen her reach the pinnacle of her profession, as one of the first female cellar masters at a leading champagne house.

Memory, next – and some of Séverine Frerson's earliest recollections are bound up with champagne. A native of the region, yet not from a family of winegrowers, she has vivid memories of days spent with friends who tended vineyards in Verzenay. She recalls the excitement of the grape harvest and the odour of the presses, just as she remembers the smell of her grandmother's homemade strawberry jam – of which she was strikingly reminded the first time she tasted Perrier-Jouët Blason Rosé, with its luscious aromas of red fruit.

Lastly, intuition, which guides her in both her personal and her professional life. Professionally, when she is selecting the clear wines that will become part of a blend, she will often choose one without first looking at its cru, in order to taste it without preconception. A single tasting is all Séverine Frerson needs to remember a wine, after which she classifies it in one of the myriad tiny drawers that make up her mental library.

Sharing and innovation

As she steps into her new role, Séverine Frerson feels a special affinity with the cultured, spirited young woman from a family of Normandy merchants whose name is one half of Maison Perrier-Jouët. “Quite apart from the romance of her relationship with Pierre-Nicolas Perrier, I see Rose-Adélaïde Jouët as a woman of character and independence, just like I am,” she says. “When I was looking through the archives, I found that she took an active role in receiving visitors and presenting the House and its cuvées. She placed great importance on exchange and conviviality, which is exactly what I do myself. I would never, for example, taste wines on my own – it’s an experience I always want to share with others.”

When it comes to tasting wines, Séverine Frerson’s personal sensibility emphasises texture. Even as a child, she remembers feeling compelled to touch the leaves and the grapes on the vine, and – over the course of two decades in the profession – she has honed her sense of touch until it has become almost as important to her as her sense of smell. Now, as cellar master, she is drawing her team into her innovative approach, linking Maison Perrier-Jouët’s language of flowers with the language of texture as she sets her sights on ever greater precision and perfection.





To perpetuate the style and quality of the House while ushering it into a new era is a challenge to which Séverine Frerson will surely prove more than equal. Having evolved in symbiosis with nature since it was founded, Maison Perrier-Jouët is stepping up its environmental initiatives to meet ambitious targets. It has already achieved the French government's High Environmental Value certification, as well as the Sustainable Viticulture in Champagne label, and is currently implementing a zero-herbicide policy in its vineyards, experimenting with innovative growing practices and machinery, and increasing its contribution to the circular economy. From navigating the vagaries of climate to spearheading new, more sustainable methods of viticulture, Maison Perrier-Jouët's eighth cellar master will need all her passion and intuition, not to mention her considerable reserves of energy and resourcefulness. "So much the better," she says. "I hate routine!"

A new series of seven podcasts entitled **"Artisans of the Wine"** and featuring Hervé Deschamps has been created to nourish the memory of the three decades he has dedicated to his passion for champagne. Each episode is a conversation with a personality from the worlds of wine and gastronomy whose path he has crossed during his long career. The podcasts can be found on streaming platforms such as Apple Podcast, Spotify, Deezer, Google Podcast...

Questions to Hervé Deschamps

Do you remember the day you arrived at Maison Perrier-Jouët?

It was 7 February 1983 and I was 26 years old. I was taking over from Emmanuel Charpentier, who was responsible for the fermenting room and the cellars. There was a transition period of two months before he retired, during which I had to familiarise myself with the topography of the cellars and the teams I would be managing. To mark his retirement, the Chairman Michel Budin and Cellar Master André Baveret opened a bottle of the 1942 vintage – the year Emmanuel Charpentier joined Maison Perrier-Jouët. It was the first time I had tasted a vintage champagne.

What does transmission mean to you?

It is about passing on a 200 year-old heritage – a heritage that is living and will continue to evolve, but which also represents values that must be preserved. Looking back, I started to think about it around the time of the bicentenary in 2011. That was when I realised my retirement was on the horizon!

What have you learned from Séverine since the beginning of the transmission period?

Séverine is exceptionally sensitive to the textures of wines. Whereas I have always considered the texture of a finished wine, she extends that approach even to clear wines, which is something I had never done before.

If you had to compare Séverine to one Perrier-Jouët cuvée, which would it be?

Definitely Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque, for its combination of floral notes with great structure and precision.

«Séverine is exceptionally sensitive to the textures of wines.»

What emotion do you associate with the grape harvest?

It's more a memory than an emotion. My father was in the army, so I spent my earliest years abroad. I was born in Morocco, and we also lived in Algeria and Cameroon. I was seven years old when we returned to France in November 1962, and my grandfather, who was a winegrower in the Côte des Blancs, had pricked the stems of bunches of Chardonnay into potatoes to stop the grapes, which he had harvested two months earlier, from drying out. When I think back to that moment, I can still feel their taste in my mouth.

What is your favourite part of the champagne-making process?

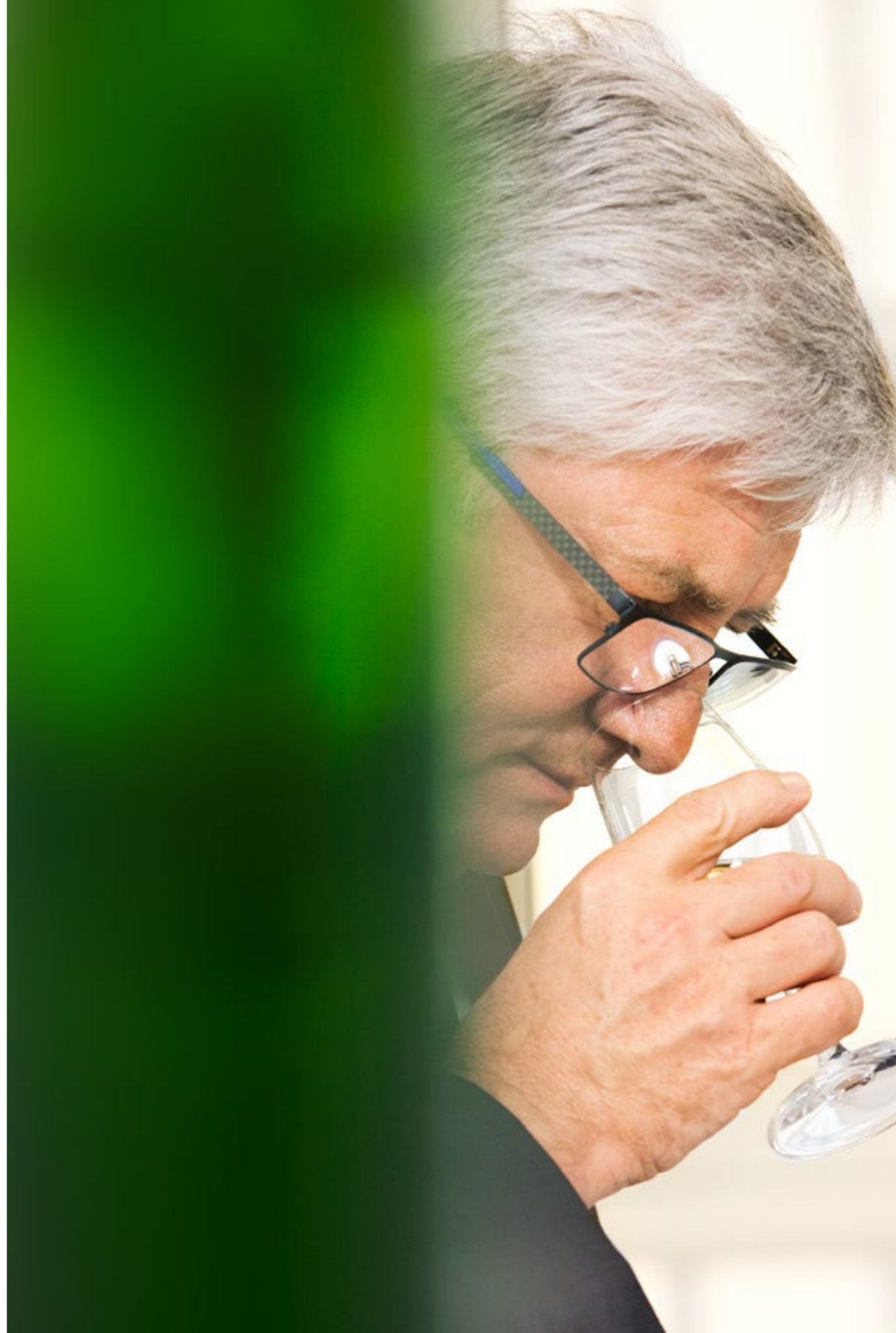
The tasting of the clear wines, when you discover the wines of the year for the first time, is always a moment of great excitement, a revelation. All your senses are heightened as you begin to imagine what the future cuvées might be like and to draw on your memory of previous years. It's a mixture of discovery and creativity.

When you are tasting champagne, which is the first sense you use?

The first sense I use is sight, to evaluate the colour, the liveliness of the wine and the size of the bubbles. You can tell a great deal by looking at a champagne – whether it is old or young, for a start. Next, I activate my sense of smell. For me, this is the sense that is richest in emotions and evocations. It allows me to understand the wine. Finally, my taste buds provide a complement to the notes I have perceived or not perceived with my nose, as well as information about the fullness, structure and personality of the wine.

What makes a successful tasting?

A successful tasting should be one you remember, and it should always be a pleasurable experience.





What does nature mean to you?

It is the origin of life, a harmony in movement. Spring is my favourite season, a time of renewal which I associate with the tasting of the clear wines. I also look for inspiration in nature, particularly in flowers, to enrich the notes I take during tastings.

If you had to associate a Perrier-Jouët cuvée with something in nature, what would it be?

I associate Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé with the lush pink peonies I admired during one of my visits to Japan.

Which is your favourite Perrier-Jouët cuvée?

Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs. It has all the freshness and purity which I look for in a champagne.

Is there a particular Perrier-Jouët cuvée which evokes a special memory for you?

Perrier-Jouët Blanc de Blancs reminds me of my first holiday with my wife in Sicily, back in the spring of 1987. We went for a walk through a lemon grove near Mount Etna. Perrier-Jouët Blanc de Blancs never fails to evoke the sweet, delicate smell of the lemon trees in blossom.

Which is your favourite piece in the Perrier-Jouët Art Nouveau collection?

I love the cabinet by Jacques Gruber in the salon Majorelle of the Maison Belle Epoque, which evokes a rock or perhaps a woman looking towards the horizon. It is a very graceful piece, and its upper part is carved with bleeding-heart flowers which in French we call "cœur de Marie". I like to imagine that the woman's name is Marie...

Which is your favourite work from the House's collaborations with contemporary artists?

The installation Lost Time by Studio Glithero, with its strings of metal beads suspended over still water. I will never forget the first time I saw it at Design Miami/ 2012.

You approached it through an entirely dark chamber and then suddenly you came upon this wonderful, poetic vision. The effect was very dramatic. It is now in the Perrier-Jouët cellars, and it transports me into another world whenever I see it.

Of all the countries you have visited, which is your favourite?

I love Japan. It is a country of connoisseurs. I first spent a week there back in 2004, visiting Tokyo and Osaka. One evening, after a dinner at La Tour d'Argent in Tokyo, my Japanese hosts seemed in a hurry to pack me off to bed. When I returned to my hotel room, it was full of messages from all the people I had met thanking me for my visit and inviting me back as soon as possible! I realised then just how much the Japanese conceal their emotions.

If you had to describe yourself in three words, what would they be?

Epicurean. Humble. Humanist.

«When you discover the wines of the year for the first time, is always a moment of great excitement, a revelation.»

Questions to Séverine Frerson

Do you remember the day you arrived at Maison Perrier-Jouët?

I do! I remember walking into the courtyard of 26, avenue de Champagne and feeling surprisingly serene. Maison Perrier-Jouët already felt like home – no doubt because its values are ones I share. Now, of course, I have the impression that I have been here much longer than I actually have.

What does transmission mean to you?

For me, transmission means sharing, working together. I think of it as handing over the baton in a relay race. Transmission is about continuity and perpetuating the style of the House, yet adding something of your own personality.

What have you learned from Hervé since the beginning of the transmission period?

Hervé has an encyclopaedic knowledge of plants, and he has definitely helped me to gain greater confidence and precision when describing wines in terms of flowers.

If you had to compare Hervé to one Perrier-Jouët cuvée, which would it be?

It would be Perrier-Jouët Blason Rosé. Its personality really resembles Hervé: calm and smiling, with a gourmet tendency!

«For me, blending is the absolute pinnacle of the cellar master's art, and the reason I chose the profession in the first place.»

What emotion do you associate with the grape harvest?

When I was little, my family had friends with vineyards in Verzenay. I remember the frenzied activity of the grape harvest and the smell of the presses. I still feel that excitement today.

What is your favourite part of the champagne-making process?

Blending, without a doubt. It's a truly magical time, when intuition, passion, creation, emotion and memory all come together with exceptional intensity. For me, blending is the absolute pinnacle of the cellar master's art, and the reason I chose the profession in the first place.

When you are tasting champagne, which is the first sense you use?

I am always guided by my sense of smell. Afterwards, it is a combination of taste and touch. The texture of a wine is very important to me. To describe texture, I often compare it to elements from nature – a particular kind of petal or the underside of a leaf, for example.

What makes a successful tasting?

One which leaves everyone with a smile on their face! For me, tasting is a pleasure to be shared, and I can't imagine not feeling happy afterwards. I like to see the faces of the people I'm tasting with and to watch for their reactions.





What does nature mean to you?

For me, nature is freedom. It's also where I like to unwind. A walk in the forest or a stroll through the vines always does me the world of good. I need to have physical contact with nature, to actually touch a leaf or a branch as I go by.

If you had to associate a Perrier-Jouët cuvée with something in nature, what would it be?

I associate Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque with white orchids, which also happen to be my favourite flower. When I got married, I carried a bouquet of white orchids intertwined with ivy, which I had picked myself. For me, Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque has the same combination of grace and elegance, delicacy and vibrancy, as well as the taut, structured quality of a white orchid.

Which is your favourite Perrier-Jouët cuvée?

I think it would have to be Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs. It is a cuvée for connoisseurs, the absolute quintessence of Chardonnay.

Is there a particular Perrier-Jouët cuvée which evokes a special memory for you?

The first time I tasted Perrier-Jouët Blason Rosé, I was vividly reminded of the strawberry jam my grandmother used to make from fruit we picked together in her garden. I would spend many happy hours there, tasting all the produce!

Which is your favourite piece in the Perrier-Jouët Art Nouveau collection?

Auguste Rodin's Eternal Spring. Although it is the odd one out among all the Art Nouveau pieces, the title evokes the spirit of renewal associated with the Art Nouveau movement.

Also, I find the story behind it very touching: it was presented to Henri Gallice on the 100th anniversary of Maison Perrier-Jouët by the employees, and bears the inscription "Au patron" (to the boss). That sums up the family spirit of the House, which is still evident today.

Which is your favourite work from the House's collaborations with contemporary artists?

I am fascinated by Ephemera by Mischer-Traxler. It is a large oak table inlaid with different plant motifs – ferns, fungi, flowers – which seem to grow and move when nobody is looking, but retreat back into the table when anyone approaches. It raises all sorts of questions about our relationship with nature, and indeed about the essence of life itself.

Of all the countries you have visited, which is your favourite?

It would have to be Spain. My husband is Spanish and, through him, I have really come to love the country. I have wonderful memories of family holidays in the region around Barcelona. It's a destination that has everything – amazing art and culture, beautiful gardens and landscapes, fabulous food and a warm welcome.

If you had to describe yourself in three words, what would they be?

Passion. Memory. Intuition...

«For me, nature is freedom. It's also where I like to unwind.»

Maison Perrier-Jouët: the first six Cellar Masters

Portraits Chefs de Cave

Pierre-Nicolas Perrier

Cellar Master from 1811 to 1848

The founder of Maison Perrier-Jouët set the standards of excellence which have been upheld for more than 200 years. He acquired his mastery of viticulture techniques from his uncle, who was responsible for the family vineyards, and no doubt his passion for botany too. A keen horticulturalist, he built large greenhouses in which he grew a vast array of plants. It is possible that his wife, Rose-Adélaïde, who was actively involved in the business, also joined him in selecting and blending wines.

Henri Gallice

Cellar Master from 1874 to 1918

Henri Gallice, the nephew of Charles Perrier, further enhanced Maison Perrier-Jouët's reputation for quality. He refused to produce "tisane de champagne", a third category of wine with more sugar and less alcohol than champagne, and rationalised the product range. In particular, he introduced the Brut Perrier-Jouët cuvée, of which Perrier-Jouët Grand Brut is the direct descendant, and acquired exceptional vineyard plots in the Côte des Blancs, notably in Cramant. An art lover, he also initiated Maison Perrier-Jouët's enduring association with the Art Nouveau movement.

Jean Jung

Cellar Master from 1944 to 1963

Renowned for his mastery of the art of blending, Jean Jung created both the prestigious Blason de France cuvée and Maison Perrier-Jouët's first rosé champagnes. At harvest time, he could always be seen standing in front of the storerooms, ready to taste each barrel as it was unloaded from the lorry. Depending on the mark he gave it, the barrel would then be allocated to a specific future cuvée.

Charles Perrier

Cellar Master from 1848 to 1874

The son of the founders, Charles Perrier inherited from his father both his keen interest in horticulture and his talent for blending champagne. In response to the preference of British customers for a drier taste, he increased the proportion of the House's signature Chardonnay grape and significantly lowered the percentage of sugar, creating the first lightly dosed champagnes in the style today known as "brut". His celebrated 1874 vintage had the reputation of being the most expensive champagne of the 19th century.

Henri Bérard

Cellar Master from 1919 to 1944

It fell to Henri Bérard to guide Maison Perrier-Jouët through troubled times, to which he responded by diversifying the product range and introducing the House's first all-Chardonnay cuvée, named "Cramant millésimé". He subsequently created a Bouron Leroi cuvée, using Chardonnay grapes sourced from exceptional plots in Cramant, which can be regarded as the ancestor of today's Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs.

André Baveret

Cellar Master from 1964 to 1993

André Baveret's place in the history of Maison Perrier-Jouët is assured by the fact that he created two of its most legendary cuvées: Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque and Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé. Much respected by his peers, he helped to establish the Association Amicale de Chefs de Caves de Champagne, at which the cellar masters of rival houses meet informally several times a year to discuss all things champagne.





About Maison Perrier-Jouët

Founded in 1811 in Epernay, Maison Perrier-Jouët is one of France's most historic champagne houses, but also one of its most distinctive, renowned for its floral and intricate champagnes which reveal the true essence of the Chardonnay grape and an enduring tradition of savoir-faire – an unparalleled expertise of only seven Cellar Masters since its foundation.

A boutique house with a family spirit, Perrier-Jouët has been profoundly influenced by its founders' love of nature and art – twin inspirations which allow it to create exceptional experiences and moments of wonder that enhance everyday life. Since its 1902 collaboration with Art Nouveau pioneer Emile Gallé, creator of the anemone design for its Perrier-Jouët Belle Epoque prestige cuvée, Perrier-Jouët has commissioned work from established and emerging artists including Daniel Arsham, Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance, Miguel Chevalier, Makoto Azuma, Tord Boontje, Studio Glithero and Simon Heijdens, and more recently Vik Muniz, mischer'traxler, Ritsue Mishima, Andrew Kudless, Luftwerk and Bethan Laura Wood.

Media contacts

Bastyen Vandrille
Maison Perrier-Jouët
bastyen.vandrille@pernod-ricard.com

Silène Fry
Maison Perrier-Jouët
silene.fry@pernod-ricard.com

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