

WINE CHAMPAGNE

THE TASTE OF HISTORY

Elegant Pol Roger champagne is a long-established favourite on our shores – lucky **MARK HEDLEY** samples its wonderful 2002 vintage



AS JANCIS HAPPILY reports [see left], English wine continues to grow from strength to strength. And it's always nice to hear about a Sussex sparkler trumping the Frenchies in a blind tasting now and again.

But in all honesty, it's hard to find one that can take on the purity of Pol Roger – especially its elegant 2002 vintage, released last month. So it's probably just as well we can call Pol one of our own (sort of). You see if it wasn't for the British, the brand wouldn't necessarily exist.

Although the house had been making wine since 1849, it was the burgeoning horde of British devotees who convinced Monsieur Roger to bottle under his own name. By 1878, the brand new Pol Roger cuvée finally made its way to British shores – and we've had difficulty letting go of it ever since.

Great British hero (and heroic drinker) Winston Churchill adopted it as his house champagne, famously declaring: "In defeat I need it, in victory I deserve it." And it was the magnum of choice at Will and Kate's shindig last April. The prince should be kicking himself that he didn't hold off for a year – as the 2002 would have been well worth the wait.

Only producing a vintage when the growth warrants (this is the first time since 1998), Pol Roger has allowed its 2002 nine years of

cellarage before it was deemed ready – holding on for longer than many of the larger houses.

The 2002 comprises the house's trademark blend of 60% pinot noir and 40% chardonnay from 20 grands and premiers crus vineyards in the Montagne de Reims and the Côte des Blancs. The result is a rich, creamy champagne, the perfect drinking partner to smoked salmon, as I discovered at a launch dinner in Berry Bros & Rudd. Which, by the way, has to be one the most charming places to host a corporate dinner in London.

In fact, the 2002 held its own on all three courses – even against a superb guinea fowl with truffle brioche. Indeed, if Churchill could've got his hands on a bottle, it would've worked well for breakfast, lunch *and* dinner. ■
Pol Roger 2002; £65; Berry Bros & Rudd; BBR.COM



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POL ROGER Depuis 1849, excellence et indépendance