

Entente cordiale

Pol Roger has always had a place in the hearts of the British, says **Lucinda Bredin**. Churchill even had a special cuvée named after him

Top right: The Pol Roger château in Epernay
Below right: The cellars



Winston Churchill, the most illustrious devotee of Pol Roger champagne, once said, "My tastes are simple. I am easily satisfied with the best." His favourite vintage of Pol was 1928, but in fact the enduring British love affair with this champagne house goes back to the Victorian era.

From a family of notaries, Pol Roger began his eponymous firm in 1849. The production during the first year of operations was only 1,000 cases, but by 1852, the first of his labelled champagne was shipped to England and elsewhere on the Continent. What especially appealed to the English was its Brut or dry style, and the fact that the house bottled its champagne in imperial pints, which became the favoured bottle size in all prominent London clubs. Soon, Pol Roger champagne became a firm favourite with Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, which earned it a Royal Warrant still held to this day. By the turn of the century, Britain was the largest export market for champagne, a position which it has held more or less ever since.

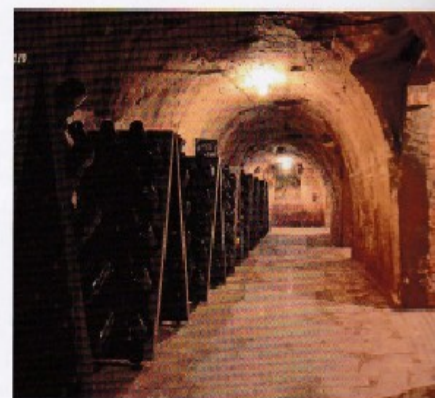
Winston Churchill developed a taste for Pol Roger as early as 1908, but it was after France had been liberated in 1944 that this fruitful relationship really took off, thanks to a member of the family. Odette Pol-Roger, who had married Jacques, Pol's grandson, was one of the famous beauties of her generation. The great-granddaughter of art collector Sir Richard Wallace – she and her two

sisters were known as the 'Wallace Collection' – Odette made a great impression on Churchill when they met at the British Embassy in Paris in November 1944. A tradition began whereby the ambassador, Duff Cooper, invited Odette to lunch with Sir Winston whenever he visited Paris. She reciprocated by keeping Churchill supplied with his favourite 1928 vintage until it was exhausted in the fifties. Sir Winston continued to drink subsequent vintages until his death in 1965. To mark

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this mutual admiration, a decade later Pol Roger introduced a special vintage cuvée, 'Sir Winston Churchill', which is produced in great vintages – the latest being offered is 1999.

As Richard Harvey, Bonhams Global Head of Wine, points out, Pol Roger has always done well when offered for sale at auction: "In September, we sold a bottle of the 1947 vintage – specially disgorged in 1981 for the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. In July we sold two bottles of 1952 and one bottle of 1953 for £1,600." Such is the attraction of this famous marque that Bonhams has recently made Pol Roger



its house champagne for all events. According to Harvey, "Pol Roger exerts more care and control than any other leading champagne house. It's a perfect fit with Bonhams – both are independent, family-controlled businesses that are firmly rooted in tradition but innovative in facing the future."

Lucinda Bredin is Editor of Bonhams Magazine.

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