



CHAMPAGNE SUPERNOVA

*He's a dashing French baron with a château in Bordeaux, a delicious new champagne brand and a Bond girl to boot—what could be more glamorous than that? **Melissa Twigg** meets **Baron Philippe Sereys de Rothschild** to find out about his collaboration with Longines*

SO, DO YOU own a house in Bordeaux, then?" It's possibly the lamest question I've ever asked in an interview, but the very charming Baron Philippe Sereys de Rothschild handles my faux pas with aplomb. "Oh, just a little place, good for weekends when I want to escape Paris with my partner and children," he says. This "little place" is actually Château Mouton Rothschild, a magnificent 20-bedroom estate in Pauillac that's fit for a storybook—or at least a Hollywood film about Europeans leading terribly glamorous lives. And the partner in question is Carole Bouquet, former Bond girl and icon of French cinema.

In my defence, Sereys de Rothschild (who prefers not to be called baron, as he says it feels like people are addressing his grandfather) is very down to earth, which makes it easy to forget about his illustrious heritage. His grandfather, the first Baron Philippe, was a charismatic playboy who raced Grand Prix cars, published poetry and spent decades lobbying the French government until his wine, Mouton Rothschild, was promoted to the classification of premier cru in 1973.

The current baron's parents, the late Philippine de Rothschild and Jacques Sereys, were famous French stage actors. Surprisingly, the young Sereys de Rothschild decided not to pursue a career on the stage or in the vineyards; instead, he entered the world of finance after obtaining an MBA from Harvard Business School.

"Well, I knew straight away that I wasn't going to be an actor—you either have it in you or you don't," he says in his cut-glass English accent, the result of three years at a British boarding school. "And as for the wine side of things... well, I didn't always know I'd go into wine, but I always knew I was going to drink it. Ultimately I needed to learn more about the world before I settled on any one career."

After more than a decade working at international construction companies and energy funds, Sereys de Rothschild (then based in New York) moved back to Paris to oversee the family business—winemaking in Bordeaux and the launch of a champagne brand—with his brother and sister, Julien de Beaumarchais de Rothschild and Camille Sereys de Rothschild. "Champagne is such an exciting world to be involved in," he says. "I always loved drinking it, but I only realised how much I loved the whole industry when I came back from Harvard and visited the region for the first time. I met all these talented, driven people who worked there and thought, 'This is right for us.'"

Fittingly, we meet at the Grand Hyatt Hong Kong's Champagne Bar to taste his delicious new range of fizz and talk about his coming collaboration with Swiss watchmaker Longines. The champagne is served to us in wide 1920s-style glasses and Sereys de Rothschild nods with approval. "I hate those champagne flutes everyone seems intent on using these days," he says. "You can't smell anything—and if you can't smell, then you're missing out on half the flavour. I only drink champagne out of wine glasses."

I taste all three of the excellent Champagne Barons de Rothschild—the brut, the blanc de blancs and the rosé. Despite having only been available in Asia for two years, they have made a powerful impact, with Hong Kong, Japan and Mainland China now their biggest markets after France. "We've done well here, which is wonderful. People really care about high-quality champagne in this part of the world. There's a lot of competition in the champagne industry—the big brands have huge marketing

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budgets and are owned by some of the most powerful companies in France," explains Sereys de Rothschild. "We're just a small product-oriented family brand, but I think that is exactly what appeals to people. At the core of it all is the champagne, which is very good. The taste is quite unusual, given its high percentage of chardonnay, and people always comment on that."

Champagne Barons de Rothschild is this year partnering with Longines—the brut will be served at Longines events in Paris, Los Angeles and Hong Kong for the next three years. "I'm a great fan of Longines. I like and respect the people who run it—they've created a strong global brand that's fantastically well organised. I'm proud to be a part of it."

At the end of our conversation, during which Sereys de Rothschild and I have been quaffing his delicious champagne, I apologise for not being able to ask many technical questions about it. "Oh, I'm delighted you didn't," he says with a laugh. "I'm not a technician, I know what I like and what I don't like, but I don't pretend to be an expert. When I talk about my champagne or my wine, I talk about it like a consumer. It's something to enjoy and if you overcomplicate it, you take some of the pleasure out of it. Champagne in particular is about making people dream—and it gives me great happiness to be able to do that." 🍷

GRAND ESTATE Baron Philippe Sereys de Rothschild (far left) and Château Mouton Rothschild



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