

Raising the Bar on Kosher Bubbly

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The name Rothschild is a formidable and storied one, especially in the world of wine—even kosher wine. While their foundations remain in the fine-wine world of Bordeaux, decades ago the family branched out with numerous wine projects around the world. Their Jewish roots enticed parts of the family to dabble in kosher wine production as well. Among the many and varied quality kosher wines they've produced are several outstanding kosher wines from Bordeaux, and even a few from Argentina. Thankfully, we may now add premium kosher Champagne to the list.

The project began in 2005. As **Philippe Sereys de Rothschild**, chairman of Baron Philippe de Rothschild SA, and son of the late Baroness Philippine de Rothschild (1933-2014), once explained it to an interviewer in Bloomberg: "Quite a long time ago we were always thinking, 'Let's try and do a Champagne.' But how do we do it? Do we buy a little maison du champagne? Do we buy a brand? Do we buy both? How do we do it? So we never really went forward, until a couple of years ago we started going in the region to see what people were doing."

The three French winemaking branches of the family—Baroness Philippine de Rothschild and her son Philippe Sereys de Rothschild of Chateau Mouton-Rothschild (also known as "Baron Philippe de Rothschild SA"), Baron Eric de Rothschild of Chateau Lafite-Rothschild (aka "Domaines Barons de Rothschild"), and Baron Benjamin de Rothschild of Chateau Clarke (aka "Compagnie Vinicole Edmond de Rothschild")—joined forces for the first time in their history to pursue the allure of the effervescence of Champagne's wine.

The name Rothschild, which is today synonymous with fine French wine, began its winemaking journey in the 19th century. Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1744-1812), founder of what was to become the Rothschild family banking empire, sagely decided to extend the family's influence and further safeguard the business by dispatching his five sons to Frankfurt, Vienna, Naples, London and Paris, the commercial centers of Europe. James de Rothschild, the youngest of Mayer's sons, founded the Paris branch in 1811. In 1853, James' daughter Charlotte and her husband—Nathaniel de Rothschild, a cousin from the London branch of the family, bought Château Brane Mouton in Bordeaux's Médoc region, and it was renamed Mouton Rothschild. A little more than a decade later, in 1868, James himself bought Château Lafite also in the Médoc, and added Rothschild to the estate's name.

More than a century later, in 1973, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, great-grandson of James, bought and renovated two lesser-known Médoc estates, Château Clarke and Château Malmaison. Having long since branched out of Bordeaux, the Rothschild's winemaking empire is truly global, with wine estates across North America, South America, South Africa, Australia, and finally now also Champagne.

"However surprising it is," Philippe Sereys de Rothschild told Bloomberg, "the Champagne region was very unknown to us, so we sort of tiptoed in and finally spotted a place that was the closest to what we wanted: Cave Vertus."

So the family contracted with Cave Vertus in Reims (Champagne) to make wine for them to their rather exacting specifications. The Rothschilds demand excellence in their wines, and commands only the very best from their grape growers. After extensive research, grapes were sourced from the Champagne region's best terroirs, including Côte des Blancs (Chardonnay) and Montagne de Reims (Pinot Noir). The Champagne Barons de Rothschild Brut Cuvée is a complex assemblage, or blend, of 60 percent Chardonnay and 40 percent Pinot Noir. They also blended in 40 percent reserve wines as an added assurance of exceptional quality and consistency over time. This is unmistakably premium winemaking.

As Philippe Sereys de Rothschild declared at the initial release of the Champagne: “I have been passionate about this project with the vision to create for the family a grand Champagne. It is the Chardonnay that gives our Champagne the character, personality and balance... and expresses all the nuances that remind us of what made the quality of our wines for over 160 years, and the expression of the terroir.”

Exclusively imported by the Herzog's Royal Wine Corporation, the world's largest kosher wine producer and importer, the kosher Champagne Barons de Rothschild Brut Cuvée is available now at roughly the same price as its award-winning non-kosher counterpart (\$90). It is also mevushal, no doubt easing its forthcoming appearance on kosher restaurant wine lists in the near future. The bar of excellence for kosher bubbly has just undoubtedly been raised.

By Jay Buchsbaum