

Champagne – James Bond’s royal flush



Avid fan Jonathan Reeve analyses the champagne choices in the Bond-related work of Ian Fleming and Cubby Broccoli and his successors. The creative images are all Jonathan's own work and we are grateful to Purple Pager Joe Pickering of Jonathan Cape who helped us with permission to reproduce the book jackets.

2021 is a big year for 007. After a COVID-extended six-year absence, James Bond will return in Eon Productions' 25th Bond film, *No Time to Die*. This article was originally timed to coincide with the film's release, postponed by an entire year to this Friday 2 April 2021, but even this date has been cancelled. The film is currently scheduled to be released in October (just before Bond's own 101st birthday) and will be the last featuring Daniel Craig, the longest-serving Bond actor. Watch out for the dramatic opening scenes filmed around the southern Italian wine towns Matera and Gravina.

In honour of this *grande année*, I recently read all 14 original Bond books, during which I discovered fascinating depths not evident in the films. Most intriguing were the little-known layers to 007's relationship with intoxicants, which has evolved significantly over time, apparently to keep up with the times. Between the first book and the current film, the change is jaw-dropping. In the 1950s, Fleming wrote Bond as a hard-edged user who smoked heavily, stirred pepper into vodka and amphetamine sulphate into Dom Pérignon (read on).

By the 1980s amphetamines were illegal and smoking was no longer macho, so Timothy Dalton's Bond drank relatively little and in *Licence to Kill* (1989) smoked 007's last-ever cigarette. By 2002, Pierce Brosnan had followed suit with the final cigar (*Die Another Day*). In 2006, as cocktails and gin were enjoying renewed popularity, Daniel Craig reinstated Bond's hardened spirits-drinking edge, notably with the legendary Vesper martini. But in 2020 even Craig's edgy Bond toed the modern health-conscious line, appearing in ads for alcohol-free beer.

Times may have changed, but 007 has kept his two trademark drinks: vodka martinis and champagne. Martinis steel his nerves and sharpen his brutal side. Champagne is his restorative – his consoling comfort.

In the life of a secret agent ... there are occasions when he takes refuge in good living to efface the memory of danger and the shadow of death. (*Live and Let Die*, 1954)

Bond has enjoyed many fine wines over the years – antique sherry, top bordeaux, even Piesporter Goldtröpfchen (featured in an article to follow). But champagne is his constant – the persistent bead threading through his whole story from 1953 to today. However often Bond is tortured, beaten, poisoned or shot, champagne proves just enough to comfort and console him; champagne is 007's own quantum of solace.

Pommery, Krug, Veuve Clicquot, Dom Pérignon, Taittinger and Bollinger have all featured in Bond's champagne history. Only the last three appear regularly however. Their three stories, below, tell the tale of 007's relationship with champagne – both literary and commercial.

Bollinger – ace of diamonds

Bollinger is the obvious place to begin, holding an unchallenged position as the official James Bond champagne for 14 films and four decades. Although not

Bond's first champagne, it has popped up in every film since *Moonraker* (1979), and will again in *No Time to Die*. Bollinger pays licensing fees for its limited-edition Bond-branded products, but the long relationship rests on a gentleman's handshake. In the late 1970s, Bond movie producer Albert 'Cubby' Broccoli visited Bollinger, hosted by the great Madame Lily Bollinger and company president Christian Bizot. Bizot family lore has it that Broccoli was particularly won over by the cup of tea he was offered by Madame Bollinger. Over dinner, Broccoli and Bizot agreed that Bollinger would be the official Bond champagne for the upcoming *Moonraker* film. They shook hands, and the rest is history. Once shaken, never stirred.



Clockwise from top left: Bollinger playing card (©Jonathan Reeve), *Diamonds are Forever* original book cover (©Jonathan Cape); Bollinger 007 Special Cuvée; *No Time to Die* film poster (©Danjaq); Celebrations with Arnould d'Hautefeuille of Bollinger, Albert Broccoli and *Moonraker* actress Corinne Cléry; Christian Bizot

Unfortunately for Bollinger, *Moonraker* represents the chasm that emerged between the books and the films in the 1970s. The movie fell far short of the book, in which Fleming built context and atmosphere from shots of fine vodka, barrels of Rothschild cognac, half-bottles of claret, cases of Taittinger and bottles of Dom Pérignon. By comparison, the movie felt almost like a pantomime. It gained a touch of class from the understated Bollinger bottle in Holly Goodhead's bedroom, and a rich dose of glamour from the glittering

magnum of Bollinger RD at the end, but those were possibly the classiest things about it. Bond definitely got the better end of the deal in the partnership's first outing.

The Bollinger–Bond relationship developed well after *Moonraker*, reaching a memorable climax in *Goldeneye* (1995) – a bottle of Grande Année 1988 appearing from the centre console of Bond's Aston Martin, lightly chilled. The bottle in *Casino Royale* (2007) was decidedly colder – ordered from room service rather hurriedly and 'for one', solace for Bond's latest conquest as he dashed off to murder her husband.

Bond's very first Bollinger was written in *Diamonds are Forever* (1956), sent to him by villain-turned-lover Tiffany Case as comfort after his brutal beating from the Las Vegas casino mob.

Bond slipped off the bed and examined the contents of the tray. He smiled to himself. There was a quarter bottle of Bollinger, a chafing dish containing four small slivers of steak on toast canapés, and a small bowl of [Béarnaise] sauce.

Bollinger and Béarnaise is quintessential old-school Bond. A traditional foodie, Ian Fleming would have appreciated Jancis' description of [Grande Année 1989](#): 'Savoury ... dense ... mushrooms ... like veal aux morilles'. Fleming's tastes, and Bond's, are typically described as being overtly masculine, so it makes sense that Bond would like Bollinger – often described using exactly that adjective. Could any tasting note capture Ian Fleming and his original Bond better than this one for [RD Extra Brut](#)?

After *Diamonds are Forever*, Fleming mentioned Bollinger just once more, in 1963 (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*). He died the following year, leaving 007 and his champagne habits in the warm hands of Hollywood.