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So you think you know Champagne Bollinger? Here are five facts that might surprise you

Shivani Tomar shares what she learned on a very special trip to Champagne Bollinger for the launch of its new La Grande Année.



BY SHIVANI TOMAR | PUBLISHED APRIL 2, 2026 IN [FEATURES](#)



(Image credit: Shivani Tomar)

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Nestled in the historic Champagne village of Aÿ lies one of the region's most recognisable names: Champagne Bollinger.

A family-owned house since its inception in 1829, it is nearing its 200th anniversary in just a few years.

A staple on wine lists and shop shelves, it's a brand we think we know well. Yet on a recent visit – the launch of Bollinger's classy prestige cuvée La Grande Année 2018 – I still discovered many things that surprised me.

Here are five facts you need to know about this iconic Champagne house.

1. Never-ending underground cellars



(Image credit: Shivani Tomar)

Underneath the quiet streets of Aÿ lies an astonishing six kilometres of cellars where wine bottles rest and age patiently in a naturally cold environment.

Descending down 48 steps, the cellar opens out into a maze of endless tunnels. One could easily get lost among the bottles attempting to navigate this rabbit warren.

Thankfully we were guided through by someone who knows them intimately.

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2. The house still has a human riddler



Olivier Lannez, one of Bollinger's two full-time riddlers. (Image credit: Shivani Tomar)

While the majority of Champagne houses today rely on automated riddling machines, Bollinger still performs manual riddling for all of its special cuvées and vintage Champagnes.

The house currently has two and a half riddlers: two experienced riddlers and one in training.

Asked how many bottles he riddles in a day, riddler Olivier Lannez says: 'about 45,000 bottles!' his eyes gleaming with pride.

3. The last resident cooper in Champagne



Gaël Chaunut, Bollinger's in-house cooper (Image credit: Shivani Tomar)

Not only does Bollinger own the largest collection of barrels in Champagne, it has the only resident cooper in the region. Gaël Chaunut manages around 4,000 barrels single handedly.

And with a new barrel room just inaugurated, there will be another 1,000 barrels under his remit.

In a nod to traditional cellar practices, chestnut branches are sometimes fixed around the rims of the barrels.

This simple technique protects the cellar floors from scratches when the heavy barrels are moved around.

4. Bollinger makes a still red wine



A nod back to a time when Champagne was famous for red wine production, Bollinger still makes a still red from the famed La Côte aux Enfants vineyard.

(Image credit: Shivani Tomar)

It may come as a surprise that alongside its famous bubbles, Bollinger also makes a very rare still red wine.

La Côte aux Enfants is made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes, and comes from the legendary La Côte aux Enfants vineyard.

Given it is not sparkling, it cannot be labelled as Champagne, and is therefore labelled under the [Coteaux Champenois](#) appellation.

This 4ha plot was once divided between 50 different owners. Recognising the extraordinary potential of this land in the early 20th century, Jacques Bollinger gradually bought each small plot. Bollinger now owns the entire vineyard.

Although this plot of Pinot Noir has long been used for red wine production, both for the still red and for use in Bollinger's prestige La Grande Année rosé, the house also launched a blanc de noirs Champagne from the north-west part of the plot in 2012.

The red is only made in the best vintages, and feels close in style to a top-tier Burgundy: vibrant red fruit, savoury aromas and complex notes of truffle and forest floor. Heavenly!

5. Stepping into a time capsule



The house has a collection of its own Champagnes dating back to the 1830s.(Image credit: Shivani Tomar)

Hidden deep within the Bollinger cellars is a historic wine library, which it calls Galérie 1829, housing bottles dating back to the 1830s.

I reflected on how much history these wines must have witnessed, with generations of winemakers from the Bollinger family carrying forward its legacy.

To amuse myself, I first checked my birth year, then my mother's, and finally my grandmother's, just to live in a moment where three generations of women in my family could share this quiet connection through time.

My ancestors, of Indian heritage, would probably be appalled at the thought of women drinking wine.

Madame Bollinger, though, would probably be proud.

Elisabeth 'Lilly' Bollinger played a pivotal role in making Bollinger into the iconic brand it is today.

After her husband, Jacques Bollinger, died in 1941, she took charge of the house during the Second World War.

A true visionary, she travelled to the United States after the war to promote her Champagne.

She brought in forward-thinking practises, such as late disgorgement and continued traditional ones like oak vinification, that the house still uses today.

So next time when you open a bottle of Bollinger, picture those winding cellars, the team of riddlers, the skill of the cooper, and Lilly Bollinger's legacy.

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