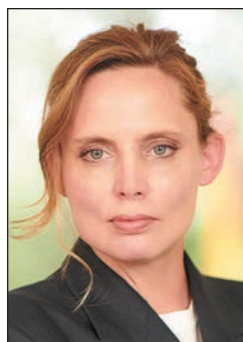


Having Your Family Name On The Bottle

An Interview with Vitalie Taittinger, President, Champagne Taittinger

EDITORS' NOTE *Vitalie Taittinger is the eldest daughter of Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger, the owner of Champagne Taittinger. She has always been passionate about drawing, painting, and design and has a degree from the Emile Cohl School of Design in Lyon. She formed her own business promoting clients in the Champagne and gastronomy sectors, then joined Taittinger in 2007. At Champagne Taittinger, her mission is to develop and reinforce the image of the Champagne House. She embodies the unique style of the Taittinger Champagne House and pursues those everyday moments of joy.*



Vitalie Taittinger

COMPANY BRIEF *Champagne Taittinger (taittinger.com) is one of the last remaining major marque Champagne Houses, both owned and actively managed by the family named on the label. Champagne Taittinger is the second largest vineyard or domaine owner in the region, providing ultimate control of quality from vine to bottle. The Champagnes are Chardonnay dominant, which gives them their signature elegance, delicacy and finesse. Champagne Taittinger is widely distributed around the world in 140 countries.*

Will you highlight the history and heritage of Champagne Taittinger?

Champagne Taittinger is among the last remaining major marque Champagne Houses still owned and actively managed by its founding family. There is a lot of responsibility when your name is on the label, but we love the challenge and are passionate about what this entails. Our history in Champagne begins with my great-grandfather, Pierre Taittinger. During World War I, he was stationed in Reims at the Château de la Marquetterie, an iconic manor in the French countryside with a rich history in Champagne. He fell in love with it at first sight and pledged to buy the Château de la Marquetterie after the war. Seventeen years later, he kept that promise and purchased the property with its surrounding vineyards, creating the foundation of the Champagne house we are today.

My great-grandfather is also responsible for setting the foundation of our gastronomic focus. He was a lover of the culinary arts, so he saw that as an opportunity to cultivate our niche for a unique style of Champagne that is light and

elegant to perfectly accompany foods. This delicate and refined Champagne highlights the grapes' natural flavors and has become our signature style. Today, we continue to build upon that legacy as an elegant Champagne that suits all of life's pleasures, especially gastronomy. This passion is one that all generations of Taittinger have shared, which led to the creation of the Le Taittinger Prix Culinare in 1968. It is an annual international culinary contest hosted by Champagne Taittinger for rising star chefs competing at the highest level. We've just hosted the

56th annual competition in Paris, crowning the newest generation of young chefs and marking another testament to our legacy.

What have been the keys to Champagne Taittinger's industry leadership, and how do you define the Champagne Taittinger difference?

We credit our leadership in the industry to our product, which results from our commitment to delivering the highest quality Champagne that we can craft. From the beginning, we've stood apart by focusing on the Chardonnay grape, which now represents more than a third of the 288 hectares in our family estate. We are now the second-largest Champagne house by surface area and one of the largest producers utilizing mostly our estate-grown grapes. This allows us the greatest control over the end product – a luxurious Champagne perfect for every occasion. This is what sets us further apart from our neighbors, as we firmly believe Champagne should not be reserved for only the "big moments" in life – we must embrace luxury every day and toast to life's little moments, too.

How do you describe Champagne Taittinger's culture and values?

We are building on long-term perspective and are even more engaged to make choices that are less financially driven and are coming from the heart. It also means restraining one's ego in the interests of building something based on a set of values that can be transmitted to the next generation.

My main objective is to continue to enhance the reputation and progress of our company. We are fortunate to have an exceptional heritage that includes the remains of Saint-Nicaise Abbey dating back to the 13th century, as well as Gallo-Roman cellars buried 18 meters below ground. It's a heritage that we want to preserve and perpetuate so that we can pass it on to the people who live in

our region, but also to all the visitors who come to discover it.

How important has it been for Champagne Taittinger to maintain a family feel as the company has grown in size and scale?

It is essential. My family has managed the Champagne house for nearly a century, and we've always pursued excellence. Having our family name on the bottle places considerable demands and responsibilities on us to ensure high-quality production. Our name on the label conveys our skills and knowledge from the past, while making our commitment to the future. For me it was very important to continue the way my father was leading the company, being attached to the human adventure that we all share at Taittinger. Only three months after I took the presidency, we had to close the doors to adapt all the processes to the COVID situation and protect our employees. I think that for me it has been a big test, and it forces us to take our responsibility at once. Changing the organization of each task in the company made me realize that it was possible to improve, to make big progress. Now we work on the structure more and have changed our own habits. Sharing the strategy and the vision of the company, being able to give to each of us a clear place, clear objectives, and clear feedback is very important to make people feel good and develop themselves. It also means restraining one's ego and to only focus on the interest of the company and its development. It allows us to build on a set of values, on harmony, to build a healthy company that can be transmitted to the next generation.

Will you provide an overview of Champagne Taittinger's offerings?

Our Champagnes are unique because we only use the highest quality grapes and a higher proportion of Chardonnay grapes in our blends than other large houses. We also take extreme care throughout the production of our wines, devoting extra time for aging and exceeding the minimum requirements for all cuvées.

Allow me to walk you through some of our portfolio starting with our most accessible, the nonvintage Champagne Taittinger Brut La Française, which is made from 40 percent Chardonnay, 35 percent Pinot Noir, and 25 percent Pinot Meunier. This subtle blend uses



perfectly matured grapes harvested from more than 35 different vineyards and results in a light, elegant, and balanced Champagne that is perfect for sipping with a meal.

Another beautiful wine we make is the Prestige Rosé. It stands out for its intense color thanks to its composition and delicate formulation. Around 14 percent of the blend is, in fact, a still red wine from the best Pinot Noir grapes of the Montagne de Reims, giving this cuvée its unique color and its sweet, intense taste. The high proportion of Chardonnay (30 percent) completes the blend and creates the elegance and sophistication that our customers can expect from our Champagne.

Then, we have the crown jewel of Champagne Taittinger – the Comtes de Champagne Grands Crus Blanc de Blancs and Comtes de Champagne Rosé – the quintessential house style. The Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs is the finest example of our Taittinger house style and is always a vintage cuvée. It is made with 100 percent white grapes from the five villages with a Grands Crus classification for the Chardonnay grape (Avize, Chouilly, Cramant, Oger, Mesnil-sur-Oger).

The Rosé, which is always vintage, is only made when the year has been exceptional. It is made from 40 percent Chardonnay Grands Crus from the prestigious Côte des Blancs region and 60 percent Pinot Noir from the Grands Crus from the Montagne de Reims region. The Comtes de Champagne Rosé owes the secret of its uniqueness to the 14 percent still red wine added to the blend. It is the Champagne house's rarest cuvée.

Aside from these, we also produce the Prélude Grands Crus and Brut Millésimé, which are exceptional in quality and flavor.

Will you discuss your role leading Champagne Taittinger and how you focus your efforts?

When you are in this kind of family company, change would be a renouncement, so my aim when I came into leadership was not to change;



the aim was to go further into every detail of the elaboration of this Champagne. I think that today, with the challenge of global warming and climate change, we continue to improve our way, to be very careful with the environment, and to always think about how we can produce qualitative grapes that create the quality of our Champagne.

How critical is sustainability to Champagne Taittinger, and will you highlight some of Champagne Taittinger's sustainability initiatives?

Sustainability is at the core of our beliefs because it is a promise to the future. Stewardship of the land that breathes life into vines and grapes ensures that the family name, exceptional terroir, and surrounding ecosystem are preserved for future generations. It's also a testament to our promise and pursuit of excellence since healthy land produces healthy grapes, which is essential for excellent quality wines.

In 2017, we received two environmental accreditations: the Viticulture Durable en Champagne (sustainable vine-growing in Champagne) and the Haute Valeur Environnementale (HVE – High Environmental Sustainability). This approach also includes the responsible management of water, limited use of fertilizers, and control of waste to preserve the biodiversity of the fauna and flora across the terroir and in the vineyards. Because we own such a high percentage of our contributing vineyards, we can control what is used to treat the vines and soil. We also mitigate our need for herbicides with innovative practices like planting our vineyards with grass and using horses to plow the fields.

Outside of this, we're also a pioneer in our bottling. The whole appellation is working toward a lighter bottle where 80 percent of the glass comes from recycled materials; at Taittinger, we are at 94 percent, exceeding that standard. We are doing our best to weave sustainability throughout our production process.

Did you always know that you would pursue a career in the family business, and what has made the family dynamic work so well?

It was not my idea to join the business in the beginning as my background is art. My father had been working in Champagne for 30 years and lots of the family were also in the industry, but there was no pressure for me to join. In 2006, the business left our family for a short time; my father fought so hard to buy it back and make sure it stayed within the family. This is when I realized how strongly I felt about the business and is when I asked my father if I could join him. My background in art meant I could bring something different to what we were doing.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the wine and spirits industry?

Learn how to dare. It is always challenging to try something you have never seen or experienced. It is important to assume who you are and what you want to do with your life. Do not project yourself onto others' judgments. Learn from your failure and continue to move forward. This is very important. ●



The caves of Champagne Taittinger (above); Château de la Marquetterie (top)