

SUE EAMES

Thesis abstract

Alternative packaging in Champagne: how to maintain the luxury branding and feel while embracing sustainability and helping to save the planet.

Motivation for choosing this topic

My key motivation for choosing this topic was a firm belief that the wine trade can reduce greenhouse emissions by modifying their packaging, and that this is particularly relevant to champagne with its heavier bottle, gift packaging and glittery foil.

I felt strongly that the luxury feel could remain part of this mission; that this in turn would drive sales, keeping current consumers as their perceptions change with an increased interest in sustainability, and of course, attract new, younger eco-minded consumers.

The meetings at L'Oréal, my research in the press, discussions with Patrick Schmitt MW, and a chance encounter with Charles Philipponnat about sharing information, all confirmed this and set me on my way.

Problem/objective

The problem for me is the lack of sharing by most champagne houses, and the fact that there is no centralised hub for this information.

Surely, if we really want to embrace sustainability and lower our impact on the planet, this is key. I agree that this is a competitive and challenging market, but each house has its own unique branding, and consumers have their favourite champagne.

So, my objective was to gather together as much information as possible in one document with the idea that this could be useful to the different houses. I also wanted to fully understand the technical limitations.

I set out to check the relevance of Roger Morris' quote in Meininger's "Is Fine Wine in Sustainable Packaging a Contradiction", and John Clegg's in Nuvo magazine "hedging its bets on consumers seeing earth as the ultimate luxury".

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Methodology

My methodology was quite simple. I started by contacting the Comité Champagne, then various champagne houses either by direct email or by attending a function or masterclass so that I could meet them. I was very lucky to get an early contact with Champagne Drappier which was a great start.

I asked each of the houses the same questions so that I could directly compare what they were doing.

Of course, as well as having my own ideas, I also read extensively in the trade and other press, watched podcasts, subscribed to newsletters, and so on.

Once my proposal was accepted, I mentioned it to wine trade friends and they were very helpful at putting me in touch with appropriate people. Wine Paris was a great opportunity to make initial contacts.

Content

In terms of content, I wanted to share some market facts and figures before moving on to look at the key areas in which sustainable initiatives could, in my view, take place.

This was followed by a summary of the views and actions of a mix of selected houses: Drappier, Bollinger, Perrier-Jouët, Mumm, Moët & Chandon, Ruinart, Veuve Clicquot, Canard Duchêne and Telmont.

And then, some honest remarks from a glassmaker contact, and a distributor about the challenges the move to more sustainable packaging can bring.

Conclusion

My conclusion is that there is an incredible amount going on with champagne houses working very hard to improve sustainability, and reduce their carbon footprint. Some quickly, some more slowly, some with a lot of communication, others more discreetly.

All with the aim of saving the planet, attracting new consumers, increasing sales, modernising their brand, and of course, retaining the luxury feel.

Hopefully this thesis will go some way to helping champagne houses communicate among themselves so that everyone can move forward.

My future plan would be to try and meet the CIVC and share this document, and of course to meet up with other houses such as Philipponnat.