

## The kings of bling

**W**HAT ARE bling Champagnes, and are any of them worth the money? Have you even heard of Boërl & Kroff, Champagne Angel, Le Billionaire Champagne, or Luxor? Do you want your Champagne bottle dripping with gold or, in one instance, literally containing gold? Would you pay more than 20 times as much for a cooperative Champagne as for Château Lafite 2000?

Boërl & Kroff is available only in magnum. The Non-Vintage costs a jaw-dropping \$5,500, while you have to cough up \$7,500 for the Vintage cuvée. Champagne Angel—the brainchild of Stefano Zagni and promoted by shareholder Mariah Carey—comes in a platinum or matt-black sprayed bottle, adorned with “angel wings” and a solid silver label. Compared to Boërl & Kroff, Angel is a snip at just \$980 for the NV brut, \$1,019 for the NV rosé, and \$1,764 for the 2004 Vintage brut. Not so cheap, however, is Angel’s limited edition of 24 numbered magnums of a 12-year-old Vintage, which comes with a solid platinum label and is presented in a leather tube with diamond-encrusted screw heads and a silver top and base. At no less than \$250,000 each, you might think this must be the world’s most expensive wine. But you would be wrong. The Leon Verres Luxury Group claims to have sold five Salmanazars of Le Billionaire Champagne for a cool \$2.75 million each (if they exist, that is; see below). But the blingiest Champagne has to be Luxor, which contains a cloud of 24-carat-gold flakes.

Tasting my way through this lot, I must confess that I had the most hope for Boërl & Kroff. It did not even look like bling. It is rather classic in the way it is dressed, though it does sport a blingy 22-carat-gold plaque under the *musélet* and comes in a beautifully lacquered box with exquisite hinges. This rather begs the question, If these Champagnes are intended to be consumed, what on earth are you going to do with all the gold plaques and lacquered boxes? The reason for my hope in Boërl & Kroff lay not in any lacquered box but in the fact



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that it is produced, albeit not owned, by Drappier, a house that has demonstrated its potential, not least in our 1982 v 1985 shoot-out (see *WFW* 26). Boërl & Kroff did not impress, however. The NV was fresh but not remotely interesting, while the Vintage (1996) had a buttery-yellow hue, with oxidizing toffee aromas. Give me 15 magnums of 2000 Dom Pérignon any day!

I also tracked down Luxor to Drappier. The breakdown of grape varieties looked typically Drappier, so I asked the brand owner, who confirmed Drappier as the source. Luxor is sold out of Burgundy, because that is where the bottles are disgorged by the owner, Boisson en Or, which also adds the 24-carat-gold flakes. Although some French retailers sell Luxor as Champagne, this wine is denied its appellation because it is disgorged outside the region. Oh, and also because the gold flakes are not permitted in Champagne. In legal terms, Luxor is simply a “product of France,” and this is correctly indicated on the label. The sample I tasted was oxidized, though it is only fair to point out that it did not come direct from Boisson en Or, which was unwilling to send me a bottle, so I had to obtain a sample via a colleague.

I was not at all put off by the fact that the Champagne Angel was produced by CRVC, a cooperative in Reims, because

I have had many excellent Champagnes from various cooperatives, including a few genuinely great examples. I did not taste the quarter-of-a-million-dollar magnum, but neither the NV nor the 2004 showed the level of finesse I expect from a \$30 Champagne, let alone one that costs nearly \$1,000. It might be a question of taste to say that the bottles would look so much better had they not been sprayed matt platinum or Cavalike matt black, but it is a matter of fact that the black stuff used in place of the neck foil comes off in your hand!

As for Le Billionaire Champagne, this story was all over the Internet in 2009, but I have yet to be convinced it exists. Anyone can say anything on the Internet, so when it was announced that Leon Verres had teamed up with The Billionaire Exchange to sell 75cl bottles of the Champagne for a mere \$2,750 each, I contacted its CEO, Quintin Thompson, and asked him if Leon Verres and Le Billionaire Champagne were authentic. Thompson told me, “We received a few offers to purchase these bottles, which were relayed to the sales contact we had at Leon Verres. We haven’t spoken to the company since, but in the talks we had with them, they appeared to be legitimate.” Eventually, I established contact with Julia Förster from the communication division of Leon Verres, but she was unable to supply an empty bottle or even a photo of the label, let alone a tasting sample. Moreover, the regulatory authority, the Conseil Interprofessionnel des Vins de Champagne, insists the Le Billionaire Champagne trademark was “registered in 2008 and crossed out a year after [...]. According to us, this trademark has not been used.” Whatever its contents might be, Champagne or *vin mousseux*, if Le Billionaire Champagne does exist, it must have a label conforming to minimum EU standards, from which certain conclusions may be drawn. But Förster was verbosely uninformative on the subject.

In my next column, I reveal how Dom Pérignon, Dom Ruinart, Krug, and Cristal spawned the kings of bling. ■