

## 2002 Krug Vintage: A wine for Einstein



Tom Stevenson applauds the latest release of an exceptional vintage, of which “a sip seems to last for hours—and yet the bottle is gone in minutes”

**K**rug released its 2002 Vintage after its 2003. Krug also departed from the normal order with its 1988 and 1989, which caused a few raised eyebrows at the time, although the Champagne trade is less chronologically fixated these days. Some *chefs de caves* often said they would like to release a more forward Vintage out of sequence, but they never did—probably never dared—until Krug showed that it could, and indeed should, be done.

As Eric Lebel, *chef de cave* at Krug, has said, “When we saw that the 2003 had reached maturity more quickly than 2002, it was an easy decision to offer it sooner.” Maybe... But just because it hits its peak earlier does not mean that 2003 Krug won’t be long-lived. According to Coates law of maturity (CLM), a wine should remain at its peak for at least as long as it took to reach it. No house releases a regular Vintage Champagne when it is at its peak—a later release of an older Vintage, maybe, but a regular Vintage should be released as soon as it becomes

drinkable. Even if 2003 Krug was at its peak when released in 2015, however, CLM determines that it should plateau until at least 2027—and you can push that date further according to when you personally believe it to be at its peak (one of the benefits of CLM). In my opinion, Krug is the best 2003 there is—better even than 2003 Clos du Mesnil—thanks to its refined balance, more complete structure, and finer integration of oak.

But everything is relative, and the 2002 Krug Vintage is even better. Lebel confessed, “Making the 2003 Vintage was more challenging than the 2002. I enjoyed the task on an intellectual level but lost a few hairs in the process. The 2002 Vintage was much easier and more of a ‘Hello, I’m here’ kind of wine, while I had to dig deep with the 2003.”

### The harvest

It is amusing to read some of the 2002 reviews, and not only of Krug. Either those reviewers are trying to rewrite the vintage or they knew nothing about it in

the first place and swallowed whatever they were told as readily as the Champagne itself. How often have I read about 2002 being a perfect vintage that made itself? My first report on the 2002 Champagne harvest begins, “I’ve seen miracle vintages before, but this takes the biscuit!” From this, it is clear that although 2002 was an exceptional vintage, it got there despite, not because of, the conditions.

It poured down so hard in the last week of August that rot immediately set in and the grapes struggled to ripen, but the rain suddenly stopped in September, a north wind blew, drying the grapes, and the vines basked in a dry period. The grapes gained weight until September 5, the rot disappeared one week later, and then something extremely rare for Champagne occurred: The crop started to shrivel and concentrate on the vine as *passerillage* set in, reducing the yield by an amazing 30–40 percent. Low acidity is a feature of this vintage. Not as low as 1999, but the lowest apart from that in more than 25 years, and the pH is the third highest in 16 years (behind only 1999 and 2000). The *passerillage*, however, has endowed these wines with the highest natural alcohol level since 1990, itself the highest since 1959.

### NOTES

#### 2002 Krug Vintage

40% Pinot Noir, 39% Chardonnay, 21% Pinot Meunier; disgorged spring 2015 (ID 215028) and fall 2014 (ID 414071); dosage 6g/l

When speaking publicly, Lebel makes light of the *assemblage* in 2002, claiming it was so easy that the Vintage almost made itself, but privately he will admit that it was “an exercise in managing egos,” because so many of the individual wines had such big personalities that it was difficult to blend their characters together. Yet he not only managed to do so, he managed to do so marvelously. This is a Champagne of generosity, richness, and concentration. Although too muscular, solid, and sinewy to be described as truly elegant, it does carry itself with its own style and grace—more of a Gene Kelly than Fred Astaire, if you like. The aromas are betwixt and between the acacia-influenced floral elements of autolysis and the browner hues of the forest floor, toast, brioche, and coffee-grinds, with expansive yeast-complexed dried fruits on the palate. The telltale flick of exotic fruit, licorice, and honey on the aftertaste is the effect of *passerillage*, the hallmark of the vintage. This is a Champagne that is so imbued with the extraordinary character of 2002 that a sip seems to last for hours—and yet the bottle is gone in minutes! A true Einstein wine.

Photography courtesy of Krug