

# TOWN&COUNTRY

## You Have the Founding Mothers of Champagne to Thank for the Bubbly You Drink Today

You know the names of these trailblazers—Clicquot, Pommery, Bollinger—but did you know it was their shrewd marketing and technological innovation that made champagne world famous?

BY LAUREN HUBBARD

The 17th century Benedictine monk [Dom Perignon may get the credit](#) for developing the *methode champenoise*, but when it comes to creating the iconic sparkling wines that fill our flutes, we owe the lion's share of our thanks to the ladies.

Beginning in the early 19th century it was the women running some of history's most recognizable champagne houses who pioneered the attributes we consider mainstays today. From the iconic bottle shape to the clarity of the vintage, from that crisp, brut flavor profile to the marketing of champagne as a wine of luxury, it was the so-called "merry widows" of champagne who turned bottles of bubbly into a world-famous celebratory sip.

Why widows, you ask? Unlike many women of the era, widows were allowed the independence necessary for running a business. While unmarried women were dependent on their fathers or brothers (they couldn't even get a bank account) and married women were forced to rely on their husbands's money and power, widows were allowed to own property and businesses in their own right, control their own finances, and move freely in society.

So we want to raise a glass to these "veuves" (the French word for widows), heroines of the cork and coupe.

# Lily Bollinger

CHAMPAGNE  
**BOLLINGER**  
MAISON FONDÉE EN 1829



Not all of the revolutionary women of champagne were ladies of the 19th century. Elisabeth "Lily" Law de Lauriston-Boubers was born just shy of the 20th century in 1899. She fell in love with Jacques Bollinger—the grandson of Joseph Jacob Bollinger, who co-founded the champagne house in 1829—but her affection for Jacques wasn't the only thing sparked by their relationship; in marrying Jacques in 1923 Lily also began a life-long love affair with champagne.

At the height of WWII, Lily lost her husband, stepping up to become the head of the champagne house at 42. Her wit matched her business acumen—she was famously quoted in the [Daily Mail in 1961](#) saying, “I drink Champagne when I'm happy and when I'm sad. Sometimes I drink it when I'm alone. When I have company I consider it obligatory. I trifle with it if I'm not hungry and drink it when I am. Otherwise, I never touch it—unless I'm thirsty.” She raised the international profile of the house and introduced a new style of champagne to the market.

For years champagne houses had held a custom of holding some special wines for family and friends on the lees (the yeast that creates the second, bubble-forming fermentation in the bottle) for longer than a typical bottle for market, letting the flavors of the vintage mature in the

bottle and then disgorging them just before the bottle was meant to be served. Disgorgement, the process by which the lees are removed from a champagne bottle after fermentation, can spark a variety of flavor changes in the wine as the vintage is exposed to oxygen, so late disgorged wines can offer a combination of complexity from a long bottle aging, but also a fresh, bright flavor profile with little oxygenation.

Before Lily, this style, which she dubbed "recently disgorged" or simply "R.D.," had only been available to those with close ties to the industry, but in 1967 Bollinger released R.D. 1952 to the public, creating what would become one of the house's signature styles.