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Preface

Champagne – the very word says celebration. With it we toast success, mark life's milestones, christen ships and even babies, and welcome with hope and joy every new year.

Champagne sparkles its way into all the best moments on the world stage – royal weddings, presidents' inaugurations, nations' treaty signings – significant occasions instantly recorded in history. In these pages we join royal celebrities in Copenhagen at the wedding dinner of Prince Frederik and Princess Mary, attend a charity dinner in New York with Princess Grace of Monaco, and watch over President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Luncheon in 1961.

Champagne is also a form of applause, our way of honouring remarkable creative and intellectual achievement, the finest human endeavours. We visit Stockholm for a Nobel Prize dinner in the Blue Hall, and sit in with the great pointy heads of the day for the launch of the Oxford English Dictionary in Goldsmiths' Hall, London. And not only do we time-travel into yesterday, we also slip into celluloid when we take a peek at Babette's famous feast.

With champagne, too, we toast our friends, people who have made our world a better place. And so we observe a quiet dinner with Luciano Pavarotti in New York during an opera season at the Met, and don cashmere wraps and join Karl Lagerfeld on The Great Wall of China for the world's most extravagant fashion show ever. I welcome you as my dinner guest in Brisbane to enjoy Moët & Chandon's history-making Esprit du Siècle.

Most celebrations involve a meal, because dining together is one of the happiest gatherings we know. I hope to show you how bringing champagne to the table provides unrivalled matching potential for almost all types of food and cuisine styles. Each of the book's celebration revolves around a menu, and it brings me great pleasure to match a dish with a champagne.

No two champagnes are the same, with different terroirs, grapes, slopes, seasons, styles and techniques. Here I present two hundred champagnes, many of them readily available today, as well as some rare and iconic ones from the past that I have been privileged to drink – great treasures beyond price, as the late great Max Lake put it.

Over and above still wines, champagne brings texture and mouth aroma to a match. Its high acidity tones down saltiness, cuts through fat and reduces excessive sweetness. Its effervescence "degreases the tastebuds", while adding elegance and "height" to "heavy" foods.

So "What's for dinner?" has just become much more intriguing. Each champagne match I propose either complements or contrasts with the character of the food – qualities such as creaminess, crunch, crispness and of course taste that, in combination with the other sensations, create flavour.

My interest in champagne began in the late 1970s. From the first sip, I was overwhelmed by how a wine could be so beautifully crafted and display so many exquisite nuances. I still am overwhelmed! The aromas in particular fascinate me, assisted no doubt by my background as a floral artist.

King George VI

At the time it was tagged the greatest reception ever, and its like has never been seen since. When the King and Queen of England visited France in July 1938, it was a staged statement of solidarity between the two countries not long after Hitler had signed an alliance with Italy. The political mood in Europe was tense amid premonitions of war.

The symbolism was unmistakeable. In a show of military strength, 50,000 French troops lined the railway from Boulogne-sur-Mer to Paris as the royal carriages passed by. When King George VI and Queen Elizabeth arrived in Paris, 10,000 white doves – doves of peace – were released from an enormous flower-bedecked cage to the cheers of two million Parisians. The public reception of all time had begun.

As the royal motorcade reached Place de la Concorde, an enormous Union Jack – said to be the largest flag ever made – fluttered to life from the Eiffel Tower.

At Versailles the smartly drilled, heavily motorised might of France unrolled in a broad military pageant before the king and a host of dignitaries. The military attachés of Germany and Italy were given front-row seats, no doubt in support of the maxim attributed to the French general, Marshal Lyautey: "Show your strength so as not to have to use it."

As well as the line-up of military might, the royal visit was also memorable for the glittering display of elegance and opulence. Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe created a sensation, though all had not gone to plan. When the Queen's mother, the Countess of Strathmore, died five days before the orig—inal date of departure, the visit, postponed by three weeks to mid-July, still fell within the official period of mourning.

Royal couturier Norman Hartnell worked quickly to redesign the wardrobe entirely, replacing "many lovely colourings" with costumes more appropriate for a time of mourning. His solution was a masterstroke.

The Queen boarded the train in England wearing black ... and when she stepped onto the platform in Paris she wore all white. A French precedent for this all-white protocol had been found back in the seventeenth century, when queens wore white while in mourning.

The Parisians adored the fashionable wardrobe and Norman Hartnell was acclaimed by couturiers and made an officer of the Académie Française. His soft and impeccably elegant designs influenced Paris collections that year and were immortalised in the photography of Cecil Beaton.

Matchless, though, and priceless, were the royal jewels, which so rarely leave London. To the opera the Queen wore the 106-carat Koh-i-Nur diamond, the legendary Indian diamond with a history as dazzling as its lustre, and on another occasion she wore the magnificent "Indian" tiara of Queen Victoria, set with 2,678 diamonds. The tiara is named for the Indian rubies set into it in 1902, when Queen Alexandra had its "unlucky" opals removed. Also in evidence were the diamond garter, created for Queen Victoria and worn by Queen Elizabeth on the arm, and the jewelled badge of the Légion d'Honneur and sash.

We do not know which pieces Her Majesty wore to dinner in the Hall of Mirrors at the Château de Versailles, but we can imagine the evening. Picture the setting in Jules Hardouin-Mansart's architectural wonder with its 357 mirrors, the gilding, enormous chandeliers, and a thousand metres of painted and sculpted work by Charles Le Brun, first painter to the "Sun King", Louis XIV.

[opposite] Chandelier, Hall of Mirrors, Palace of Versailles

The banquet, hosted by the Mayor of Versailles, Henri Haye, was created by ten of the finest chefs in France. The wines, of equal importance to the meal, included the 1900 Veuve Clicquot, in honour of the Queen's birth year, and the 1895 Pommery, in honour of the King's.

Gifts presented to the royal couple included a René Lalique glass table service, a solid gold cigarette case and watercolours by Edouard Vuillard, Raoul Dufy and Maurice Utrillo.

[clockwise from top left] Koh-i-Nur diamond; Queen Elizabeth in Norman Hartnell gown, photographed by Cecil Beaton; [possibly some Crown Jewels to come]

Menu

Fresh caviar and chilled melon

Fish from Lake Annecy in béchamel sauce
with crayfish butter

Medallions of lamb

Timbale of stuffed quail

Slivers of young duck

Salad Gauloise

Granita of Lanson 1921

Young Bresse chicken in cream sauce,
with butter swirls and braised asparagus tips

Truffles prepared Périgord style

Iced Singapore mousse,
peaches, petits fours

Wines

Mackenzie Sherry "Amontillado Grande Réserve"
Chevalier Montrachet 1926
Magnum of Château La Mission Haut Brion 1920
Hospices de Beaune "Cuvée Charlotte Dumay" 1915
Corton Grancey 1919
Magnum of Château Mouton Rothschild 1919
Château d'Yquem 1921
Magnum of Château Latour 1904
Magnum of Pol Roger 1911
Magnum of G.H. Mumm 1911
Louis Roederer 1904
Veuve Clicquot 1900
Pommery 1895

Champagne Match

How delightful to read this menu – and especially the many champagnes, which were probably served at the conclusion of the meal. Here I draw on those same Houses.

CAVIAR AND MELON attracts the **Louis Roederer 1988 Blanc de Blancs,** its vibrant lively aromas immediately apparent without any need to swirl the glass. They reflect notes of jasmine, pink grapefruit, and light clear honey. It is almost as though the honey has been drizzled over fresh peaches on the palate with a layer of cashew and almond. There is a flavour of pear tatin and the wine finishes with a rich mineral lift.

Pommery "Flacon d'Exception" 1981 glides across the palate to meet the FISH IN BÉCHAMEL SAUCE WITH CRAYFISH BUTTER and find a happy home. These flacons rested in the Pommery cellars until 1999 and were released for the millennium – each year is a testament to excellence. The year 1981 was a high-acid year and there is still enough to balance the more developed flavours of mocha, baked apple, and toffee sprinkled with nuts, finishing on the palate with ripe but crisp citrus.

MEDALLIONS OF LAMB requires a wine with generous character, such as **Mumm "Cuvée R. Lalou" 1998**, which has an intriguing mix of freshness and maturity. René Lalou, after whom this new cuvée de prestige is named, was the rising star of G.H. Mumm when this dinner took place. He appears in the Mumm story that follows. Created from seven grand cru vineyards, the wine unfurls in a crescendo with a marked impression of elegance. There is a great aromatic complexity of white iris, white apple blossom and hawthorn with interlinking elements of mineral notes, nougat, orange and acacia honey. There is a layer of preserved citrus, along with deep cherry and strawberry, and hints of pineapple, truffle and custard apple, all sprinkled with hazelnut, brazil nut and praline which comes to the fore. All the fruit is wrapped in a light veil of vanilla, similar to the lightest crème anglaise. Some pink grapefruit appears, surrounded by white peach and nectarines and edged by lemon butter on toast. A wonderful vein of mineral, quartz and pearl run through the palate, and this finely balances the structure and acidity.

There is a strong personality to **Veuve Clicquot 1980**, which has the vigour and complexity to match the strength of TIMBALE OF STUFFED QUAIL. A blend of black preserved cherries, blueberries and a seductive touch of cinnamon and nutmeg is the first sensation that greets the palate, followed by the skin of red apple, some ripe apricots, and orange slices dipped in chocolate.

SLIVERS OF YOUNG DUCK calls for a lush, ripe wine bursting with rich flavours. **Pol Roger 1973** answers the call. Pomelo, ripe pineapple, blueberries and ceps fill the palate and effortlessly convey chocolate, mocha coffee and honey nuances. There is a layer of light honey toffee mixed with walnuts and a background of hawthorn florals. An amazing combination with duck.

GRANITA OF LANSON 1921**.** Imagine turning a champagne from the famous 1921 vintage into a granita! I would much prefer to have sipped this nectar, and by all accounts the example from this beautiful House lived up to the accolades that this year received. In particular, the crispness and elegance would have been retained, owing to the assertive acidity derived from this delightful non-malolactic wine.

Flavours radiate from **Pommery "Louise" 1988**, which makes it a distinctive partner to CHICKEN IN CREAM SAUCE. Perfumed aromas of ginger flowers and sweetpeas open to a palate of fresh mandarin, cashews, bright red plums, ginger grachai and rosella jam, all gently sprinkled with delicate spice, dill and mint. Finally there is a layer of baked cheese soufflé, as well as breakfast marmalade, wild cherries and yellow peaches drizzled with honey.

PÉRIGORD-STYLE TRUFFLES requires a wine of great magnitude. **Mumm "Cuvée René Lalou" 1966** is rich and concentrated, with saturated flavours of glazed citrus peel, coffee, chocolate, baked apple topped with toffee, and dried figs. There is a slight edge of spice, layers of honeyed macadamia nuts, suggestions of dried mushrooms, and a fragrant nose of mauve lilacs and ruby peonies. The wine reaches out with power and strength and has alluring characters that would make the truffles joyous!

Royal Wedding Frederik & Mary

The fairytale wedding of Mary Donaldson of Tasmania, Australia, and Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark might well have been written by Hans Christian Andersen himself.

Raised in a suburb of Hobart, Mary Donaldson studied Law at university before moving to Sydney where she worked in real estate and public relations. Frederik, on the other hand, hailed from Europe's oldest royal family, the Danish monarchy. A descendant of King Gorm the Old, Denmark's tenth century Viking ruler, Frederik boasts a lineage that tracks back more than a thousand years.

The commoner and the crown prince met at a pub in Sydney during the 2000 Olympic Games. Four years later their fairytale romance was recorded in history. When Mary Donaldson became Crown Princess Mary of Denmark, the world celebrated with her.

On 14 May 2004 the Copenhagen Cathedral, the Church of Our Lady, was dressed with masses of beautiful flowers – roses, lilies, carnations, peonies, sweetpeas, bluebells and Australian eucalyptus. The massed voices of the Copenhagen Boys Choir filled the church with triumphant Handel, trumpets sounded, and standards flew as European aristocracy turned out in force, wearing glinting tiaras, swords, medals and insignia. The last time so many dignitaries had gathered in the nave was at Hans Christian Andersen's funeral in 1875. The wedding feast was held in a candlelit marquee with a sumptuous meal themed around Danish produce. The ten-tier wedding cake towered two metres high, each tier decorated with the FMF monogram designed by Queen Margrethe, Frederik's mother. Of course champagne was served at the wedding banquet and it was from the House of Mercier. A special champagne, "Cuvée Frederik & Mary", was released for the occasion.

[opposite] Champagne glasses by Queensland jeweller John Calleija are studded with 1,700 white and Argyle pink diamonds. [above] Masses of flowers – roses, lilies, peonies, sweet peas, Scottish bluebells, and Australian eucalyptus - adorned Copenhagen's Cathedral of Our Lady for the royal wedding.