



IN REVIEW:

## **Linden's Piper-Heidsieck 'Rare' 1976-2007 Dinner Review**

A review of The Fine Wine Experience's Piper-Heidsieck's 'Rare' Champagne Dinner on 11th December 2017

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## Introduction

Last night, we enjoyed five vintages of Piper-Heidsieck's 'Rare' Champagne, their prestige cuvée made in exceptional vintages.

The event's oldest vintage – 1976 – provides our introduction as it marked the 1985 bi-centenary of the maison's founding tale: in 1785 Florens-Louis Heidsieck presented Marie Antoinette with a bottle of his Champagne – a cuvée worthy of a queen. Apparently she liked it (perhaps with cake?). In 1885, to celebrate the first centennial, Pierre-Karl Fabergé designed a fab bottle of the maison's Champagne encrusted with gold, diamonds and lapis lazuli. And, you guessed it, in 1985, Piper-Heidsieck launched 'Rare' with the release of the inaugural vintage – 1976.

A little sleuthing on the interweb reveals that Piper-Heidsieck commissioned Van Cleef & Arpels to make a single gold and diamond-encased bottle of that 1976 Rare, with a mid-'80s insurance value of USD \$100,000. That *piece unique* was on a thirteen-city promotional tour of the United States when, in February 1987, it was stolen at its last stop. Was it ever recovered? I don't know. I'll see what I can find out...

Four bottles of the 1976 Rare from Piper-Heidsieck's reserves eventually received all the sign-offs necessary to feature in our Hong Kong dinner. And wow, what a wine it was! I would say the best 1976 Champagne I have yet had the pleasure to experience.



## 1976 Piper-Heidsieck Rare

96

*Piper-Heidsieck states disgorged end of year 1980. 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir*

Pale gold with a gentle fine bead; toasty nose, a touch of white mushroom, a little nougat, plenty of dried fruits – a generous, sweet nose; elegant mousse in the mouth, ripe fruits with dried apricot, there is also something akin to mint emphasizing freshness in counterbalance to the richness of the wine. Pure and straight in style, this '76 is in great shape on its maturity plateau.

The 1976 was the fourth vintage we tasted this evening. The event began with the 2002 – still the current release (how many 2002s can you find on the market today?). This wine was the one that really grabbed my attention. It is consistently superb, as you might expect from the vintage.

## 2002 Piper-Heidsieck Rare

96

*Piper-Heidsieck states disgorged 22nd October 2014. 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir*

Pale gold with a fine bead; a bright, fresh, lively aroma of white flowers, white chocolate, candied lemon on the zesty nose; good concentration and complexity on the palate, a fine entry followed by a refreshingly bittersweet lemon and pith flavour, just a hint of quinine, a touch of briny salinity, then mineral notes and a just-dry, rounded finish with satisfying length. This wine is still in a fairly youthful phase but is open, aromatic and highly pleasing to drink. This 'Rare' offers neither reductive notes, nor oxidative notes, nor yeasty autolysis – it is instead characterized by a joyous sort of emphasis on pure fruit expression. A lovely wine.

## 1998 Piper-Heidsieck Rare (from magnum)

93

*Piper-Heidsieck states disgorged 20th April 2009.  
70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir*

Bright, light gold with a fine bead; a more reserved nose after the fruity openness of the 2002, this wine offers grilled lemons, smoke and toasted bread on the nose; fine, citrusy and creamy pure fruit intensity on the palate. This 1998 is broader-shouldered than the 2002, with a bit more heft by the mid-palate, just a little white mushroom mingles with the fruit to denote the nineteen years of age here. Everything is buoyed up by ample fluffy mousse and followed by an essency lemon citrus finish. There's real depth here – not the effortless balance of the 2002 – but plenty of depth and character, and a fine tension between youth and maturity. "P2"ish in that regard.

The 1998 and 1988 were brilliantly matched by the J.W. Marriott Hong Kong's Man Ho Chinese restaurant star turn– steamed crab claw in egg white, and steamed garoupa fillet with lobster sauce. Both dishes are absolutely food Champagnes.



1988 Piper-Heidsieck Rare

91

*Piper-Heidsieck states disgorged end of year 1990. 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir*

This wine is fine, elegant and marmalady in flavour – candied citrus and refreshingly bittersweet pithy notes, grilled nut and toasted bread, fairly concentrated with plenty in the middle. The sinewy but not quite screechy '88 mineral-laden acid grip clips the finish just a little, keeping things taut. However, the aftertaste delivers plenty of mature, smoky citrus flavours. This 1988 is just beginning to come down the other side of its drinking peak, and still very good.

I'd love to taste a late-disgorged bottle of that '88 Rare.

We concluded with a charming Rare Rosé which I thought was seductively stylish.

2007 Piper-Heidsieck Rare Rosé

93

*Piper-Heidsieck states disgorged 30th June 2015.  
56% Chardonnay, 44% Pinot Noir*

Bright, pale, new copper shade, fairly pale rosé with a persistent bead; a fresh and delicately fruity and subtle nose, red fruit and mineral; quite a generous and fruity entry, nuanced showing real class of fruit and a silky, creamy texture. There is a slight grip – a sense of the phenolics, but it is gentle, satin-like. Lovely strawberry and cream finish. Though an elegant wine, this Rosé is generous with a rounded plump mouthfeel. It's ready to enjoy now.



## Conclusion

What came through tasting these five examples of Rare in one sitting, was the clear sense of style. There is a pure expression of the fruit, refined, neither reductive nor oxidative – very straight, and that emphasis on the fruit gives the wine a joyous feeling, fun to taste, and with enough depth to pair well with food.

Happily, too, the packaging is a world away from the more sober and serious labels we see on top-tier Champagne. Available gift-boxed, these are perfect end of year gifts.



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[www.fine\*\*wine\*\*experience.com](http://www.fine<b>wine</b>experience.com)

Shop D, 85 Queen's Road West, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

**Tel:** +852 2803 0753 | **Fax:** +852 2803 0776

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