

# THE GRANDÉ DAME OF CHAMPAGNE



## LUXURY BRIEFING INSIGHT : MAGGIE HENRIQUEZ, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF KRUG CHAMPAGNE

Maggie Henriquez, the President and CEO of Krug Champagne, is the first Latino woman to head a major French champagne house. With 26 years in the wine and spirit industry and an exceptional career leading companies in South America and France, Venezuelan-born and raised Maggie is admired as both a business leader and an exceptional woman.

### *How did you first get involved with Krug?*

I was the President of all of the properties of Moët Hennessy in Argentina. Among our brands we used to have a lot of local producers, but also we carried the whole portfolio of the House. One of our brands was Krug, so this was my first connection to the brand. I was in Argentina for eight years and we were able to handle tough times and turn difficult times into positive times for the company. We were having difficult times in 2008, which was the beginning of the crisis, so the President of Moët Hennessy very kindly called me and asked me to come and work for Krug. This was quite a surprise – a pleasant surprise. I had a few doubts because it was the first time I would work with a small company – this is a small House, it is haute couture and I was used to handling large companies – but my husband, who was my boyfriend in those days, said to me. “No, no, no Maggie, you shouldn’t doubt. This is the best champagne in the world.” I agree, but of course I am completely biased. I accepted the role and I am really very happy. It’s been a long journey, but it’s been very enriching and has been an amazing experience.

### *Krug has been around since 1843. How do you keep a brand like this current?*

This is the most important issue. One of the problems we were facing was the fact that we were not keeping up to date. We were getting a little old-ish and a little dusty. It took me a while to adjust as I was not an expert on luxury brands. I soon learnt that true luxury is these Houses that are connected and rooted so much to the founders. When you talk about a true luxury House you immediately relate to someone, to a person. That person, and the brand, is alive because they are brought alive through the organisation. This was the first big job we did – connecting with our founder. It took us a while. We found out all about his history and wrote a book. Now the book has been published in five more languages as well as English.

The whole life of the House changed, because from there we knew how to establish the roots; the DNA of the House. We’ve really worked on building all the bases and this in turn has worked to rebuild a beautiful connection between the brand and the family.

Olivier Krug is sixth generation. He works alongside me in running the House and he tells everyone, "I mean imagine, I was born next door, I was supposed to know Krug. I've been working 25 years in the House and I really only discovered Krug four years ago." This is a very powerful statement. It has allowed us to understand who we are, because we understand why we exist. When you understand why you exist, you can easily be renewed through communication.

We have added a number of new items to facilitate communication. We have decided to connect with music, because we are a very musical champagne in the way we are created. We invite musicians to taste our champagnes and develop the music that goes with them. We have also created a Krug app, so every bottle of Krug has a Krug ID on the back label and this is a door to the huge universe of digital. We are still at the beginning in terms of digital, but at least we already have a door to this universe. Every bottle of Krug has a story to tell and we're making sure Krug consumers know that.

We can't modernise the actual product. You know, the harvest of 2013 won't be served in our champagnes until 2022. It takes over 20 years to make Krug Grand Cuvee and it uses a blend of around 120-130 wines from at least 11 different years. You put it to rest for at least seven to eight years, so it takes a while before your first champagne can leave the House, but you can add a lot of modernity through communication and this is what we do today. We have nothing to hide – the opposite. We have much to share.

People have changed their approach to luxury. People want true luxury and everything we say about Krug is absolutely true. It is so unique that it responds when people discover it. We communicate in two different ways. We give as much information as people would like and at the same time we invite people to sample through emotions – we say "connect to these as you connect to music." There is music in every glass of champagne and either you like it or don't – you decide. We are openly inviting people to understand that one of the most important things, not only in tasting Krug, but in any wine or champagne, is what you personally like or don't like. The best champagne is the one that you love and that gives you pleasure.

***You are part of the Krug tasting committee. How have you trained your palate?***

This kind of in-depth training takes a much longer time. I've been in wines and spirits for the last 30 years – or for 30 years of my last 36 years – so I've been trained over a long period. I was the President of Seagram's in Venezuela and we were regularly trained in tasting. Then I was building up a very technical team. We had training for seven years just on tasting. As part of that you learn to use the right wording, but it is a very technical process. What I love in regards to tasting is when you taste champagne with people who haven't done that level of training. It's important to let people feel that they can also do the tasting, because it doesn't have to be so complex. It's about giving little hints about what to think about to help people feel confident, without using so many technical words. I think for most people the technical side is really not interesting at all.

***Is it important to be able to pick out the individual flavours to really enjoy wine or champagne?***

It is good to know first whether you like it or not. Then you discover more, little by little, as you go on. The truth is, if people want to develop the capacity for tasting and identifying flavours and aromas, the best thing to do is to pay a lot of attention to anything you eat. When you are going to eat a piece of bread, instead of just eating it, you smell it. All of the flavours triggered by aroma will be registered in your mind and then you will be able to pick them out in the future. It's a tough exercise and I think sometimes it puts people off and it's not fair. I love opera, but I'm not an expert at all, and I would hate someone next to me telling me that I don't know anything about it and so I can't enjoy it. What's important is that I love it.

***How does the tasting committee work? The idea of sampling a whole lot of vintages sounds festive. Is it as much fun as it sounds?***

Champagne is the result of a long process. It's much longer than the process of making still wines or classical wines. It's a longer process because you need two fermentations – so the process develops in

two stages. The first is a wine, but if you're going to go into a second fermentation in the bottle, it's this second fermentation that creates the bubbles. Because the bottle is covered, the bubbles can't escape the bottle and this is when champagne is born. Then it needs time. Every House gives their champagne time to mature. A lot of time. This allows the champagne to become refined, to cultivate the beauty that we know it can bring, to get the finesse of the bubbles. At Krug, we give our champagnes a long time because we want our end product to be timeless. You can drink it 50 years from now, or you can drink it 80 years from now.

That means that the tastings we talk about with the tasting committee is a little different. Of course we taste the champagnes when they are ready and we make decisions – this is ready to go, this is not ready yet – but the most important responsibility of the tasting committee is to taste every single wine.

What we do at the House of Krug, from the time the company was founded up until today, is that we follow every single plot, every vineyard. In Champagne most of them are very small. Very few people and almost no Houses pay attention to the individual vineyard or plot, so this is something special that we do. This philosophy comes from the founder. He was born in Reims, so he understood that even small plots next to each other will produce different wines. So we follow every plot as one wine. Just like a director of music will listen to every single musician, one-two-three times, to make decisions on where they will use each individual and in what way, we do exactly the same. The tasting committee will, throughout the week, over a period five months, try about 1,000 to 1,100 samples. Our cellar master will take all of the notes from the committee – it's about 4,800-5,000 notes – and with all of these tasting notes, he makes the final blending decisions.

The cellar master's most important role is to make all of the decisions when it comes to blending the Krug Grand Cuvee, which is the masterpiece of the House. It is the reason for the House's existence, the dream of the founder who wanted to offer the very best champagne every year. For him, what was the best was the fullest expression of

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champagne. This is a very original and unique proposition and it's this that makes the Krug Grand Cuvee the most important champagne of the House. It's the priority for both our cellar master and for the tasting committee. It's like discovering the colours nature gives us each year – you have 250 different nuances of colour and we have 130-150 reserve wines, which are wines from over 12 or 13 years, which we have kept individually and we taste them all again. We will re-taste and refresh all the colours that we have in our library and then the idea is that the cellar master will look for the colours that he needs to create the best multi-coloured champagne. This is what Krug Grand Cuvee is all about.

When the blend is ready, it goes into the bottle and then it will rest for seven or eight years minimum. After the champagne is born we put the cork in, then after about ten months it will be ready to go to the market. After ageing, the bottle is manipulated in a process called remuage, so that the lees – the spent yeast – settles in the neck of the bottle. After chilling the bottles, the cap is removed and the pressure in the bottle forces out the ice containing the lees. The bottle is then quickly corked to maintain the carbon dioxide. These wines, the wines you taste first, they are very vibrant and very fresh. It's not quite as easy or nice to taste as still wines. I don't go to the tasting committee meetings every time because I travel a lot, but when I do go, I hear our cellar master constantly telling us "You have to project, you have to think eight years from now."



Krug Brut Vintage 2000 Champagne

***Is there one vintage that is special for you?***

My preferred champagne of the House, by far, and this is not promotion, it is true, is Krug Grand Cuvee. I think this kind of explosion of flavours and aromas is the equivalent of feeling everything a fine champagne can give you in a glass. It is the most lovely experience. But I recognise that there are some other vintages that are special and that are beautiful. When I think of the special vintages I think of 1988 and the Krug 2000, which is absolutely fabulous because it is full and elegant. My preference though is the Krug Grand Cuvee, especially when it has a little time. It's magic.

***It must be quite satisfying to know that you are contributing to future Cuvees.***

Of course, because of Krug's position and philosophy, the future is very clear. I believe that it is our responsibility to make a strong contribution to the future of champagne.

***How does the Krug Lovers concept work?***

I think Krug Lovers have always existed, but our communication was probably incomplete and people were frustrated and wanted so much more. Many of the Houses like us - Houses that were not able to properly accompany beautiful products with clear communication have been disappearing. Once we realised we had to connect with our founder, we understood why we have continued to exist. This was quite exciting because it made everything so clear and easy to understand. We realised that a big part of the reason that we are here is thanks to all these Krug lovers. Even without information, even with a little frustration, they were loyal to this House and so we are absolutely committed to recognising the beauty of these people and recognising what they have done for the House and how important they are.

One of the ways we express this is within our book, which was an intense two-year project with book publisher Assouline. The book is called Krug by Krug Lovers and it is really the history of Krug, but

through people in history that have been Krug lovers, like Boni de Castellane, Karl Lagerfeld, Francis Bacon and three-star Michelin Chefs Arnaud Lallement and Hiroyuki Kanda. There are so many fantastic people throughout history that have been Krug Lovers... and so we based the book on these people and their quotes. It is a beautiful testimony of love for the House.

The 192-page Krug by Krug Lovers is an illustrated book of musings on the champagne maker's history through the testimonies of those who love to drink its wares, set amid archival images from the house of Krug.

***Like many industries, the wine and spirits industry is fairly male dominated. What is it like reaching such heights as a female?***

***Are there more challenges?***

Well, there are always challenges. A lot of challenges. Especially when it's a different role from what you are accustomed. It's been different working for a House, rather than a company. There are always challenges in business, due to the structure, environment, the different countries involved and the project. The world is turning so fast and you have to move at the same speed. This means there are permanent challenges. I feel confident though, because I have had many years of experience. At the end, when you achieve your objectives throughout your career - I'm soon going to be 59, and I have almost 37 years of experience - little by little this adds to your confidence, which is great for me as I know that as a woman I am opening the space for other women coming behind me. I have an important responsibility which I dedicate myself to, both professionally and emotionally.

***You've achieved the magical balance of career and children. That must have added another challenge to an already demanding career?***

Yes. I got married very young. I was 21 years old. My first son was born when I was 24 and the second when I was 28. Now I have grandkids. I'm very happy, although I have to recognise it was not easy. I always

say that life will give you opportunities, and we should never avoid the opportunities that we are given, including that of bringing more life through children. It is an amazing part of a woman's being and it adds immensely to our personal style and our way of being, which is important. We are different from men. There are differences between genders and we have to accept them and enjoy them. Within an organisation we can't say it should be only men or women – it is holistic – we need both. The point is that at the end, I'm very happy with being me, which is the key and the acceptance of differences brings a lot of richness into organisations. Family life complements women – it adds a lot of difficulties for a while, but after that, it's great.

***Do you think it's important for organisations to have input from both genders or does it depend on the people?***

It is not only important, it is necessary. It is proven that organisations that have been able to combine the genders are much more successful. There's research that shows this. It's important in all kinds of ways.

***I believe you are the first female President of Krug?***

That's correct; although if we are true to our history, in 1914 and 1915, there was an amazing lady whose name was Jeanne Krug. Her husband, Joseph Krug II was a prisoner of war and she ran the House during that time. Being a nurse, she was clever and she managed well. She was the god-daughter of Victor Hugo and an interesting personality in the history of France Jeanne Krug was involved with the Red Cross in treating wounded soldiers at the Val de Grace military hospital and in various locations near Reims. She was able to keep the House running for the two years that her husband was imprisoned. I can say I'm the first CEO with this title, but she was the first real President.

What is true, that I'm very proud of, is that I am the first Latino in champagne. This is the first time a Latin American man or woman has ruled a House of champagne. Latin Americans are very warm, we are very family orientated. In this House family orientation is extremely important. The family side is completely true to our DNA, so it's been a perfect fit because it matches my nature.

***You said you travel a lot. What are you doing when you are travelling?***

I go to the markets that we operate in and do special activations. We have completely changed the way of communicating Krug, so now we have a different way of doing things. It is so closely connected to the origins, the Founder, so in the House we know our reason for being, but this message needs to be spread. So, I go to markets and I see the reaction to Krug and what people need to expand the business. It's a way of gathering feedback and inspiration to get things done in more effective ways.

***What is the best way to drink champagne?***

One message, especially for women is that naturally you can have champagne for many different reasons to celebrate life's major occasions, but champagne is not just about celebration. Good champagne can accompany you any time – as long as it is consumed from nice glasses. A white wine glass is perfect. It should be served in a small quantity, not a lot, the same that you would serve in a flute but in a wine glass, and [it should always be served] not too cold. It's fabulous to accompany food. It can really enhance a meal and a lot of people don't realise that. I'd particularly like women to know this, because women have a special passion for champagne and I invite all women to discover this way of enjoying the flavours. Champagne doesn't have to be reserved for celebrations – it can add in to an amazing gastronomic experience.

***Why in a wine glass?***

The flutes are too closed. They are too small. A good champagne, before anything, is a good wine, so a larger glass is the only way to really appreciate all that has been created in that glass. This is why, it is important to have the right glass – one you can put your nose in – because when you put your nose in, you can smell, and inhaling the aromas is critical for the experience. When you smell you have the opportunity of properly tasting. If you don't have the opportunity to put your nose in, you won't be able to properly taste every element. This is key and any tasting should start with this. Human beings smell before tasting. The aromas impact your taste buds and you will taste more completely. If you

don't do this, it is at the cost of the experience. Again, it is like arriving at a concert with earplugs in.

***So why do champagne flutes exist?***

Years and years ago when it was created, champagne-making had not been entirely mastered, so the flutes were a way of hiding the aroma, and if the champagne is served chilled, you only feel the bubbles. But if you have great champagne it's very sad to hide everything.

***Consuming a glass of Krug champagne is like drinking luxury. How would you define true luxury? What is important for true luxury to exist?***

Luxury is a commitment to excellence. It is the permanent renewing of communication and the truth behind every product. It is the key innovation, and it is always forward-looking. True luxury is always rooted in the past but at the same time always looks far into the future. It is this tension between the roots and the truth in all of what is said and done, matched with the beauty, the quality and the execution, communication and vision, along with a dash of innovation, that puts luxury brands into the long-term. It's this tension that creates the luxury experience. A luxury brand is always timely. It is always very high quality. It is never in excess. It is always beautiful. It is always high-priced. It always gives you a sense of freedom. Finally, it is always a great source of pleasure.



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