

The Champagne CODE

As G2 celebrates International Women's Day, **Suneeta Sodhi Kanga** uncorks the etiquette that swirls around bottles of bubbly

CHAMPAGNE is fast becoming ubiquitous at functions today from the big fat Indian wedding to anniversary and birthday celebrations. Here are some tips that will help you enjoy those special Champagne moments even more.

Storing and serving: Champagne is ready for immediate consumption as soon as it leaves the Champagne house, but if you provide the right conditions for your bubbly, it will last for three to four years—if, of course, you haven't drunk it by then! And don't be afraid to keep it in the refrigerator. A couple of weeks in the cold before the celebration is not going to hurt it.

For as long as Champagne wines have existed, it has been the custom to bring them to the table in ice buckets or coolers to make sure they are served at the right temperature. Half ice and half water in an ice bucket is the way to go. Experience shows that the ideal serving temperature is 8-10 °C. You may store the bottle on its side in the bottom of your refrigerator for four hours.

Under no circumstances chill a bottle of Champagne in the freezer; and never serve it in pre-chilled glasses (or you will lose some of the sparkle). Do not try to chill two bottles in a bucket; it is better to leave the second bottle in the refrigerator in an insulated container.

Never return an empty champagne bottle to the ice bucket upside-down! It shows a lack of respect for the prestigious beverage you have just consumed, and worse yet, a tactless disregard for the companions you have shared it with.

Always serve champagne in tulip-shaped flutes; the tall narrow shape of the glass will preserve the bubbles. Remember that the glasses you use must always be scrupulously clean. If there's soap residue on the glasses, you may experience lots of foam that doesn't subside. This is caused when the carbon dioxide meets the detergent. To prevent this always rinse the glasses thoroughly when they're washed.

You may probably be surprised to learn that there are very specific rules when it comes to the way you hold your glass.

Always hold your glass or flute by the stem. Holding it by the 'bowl' warms your drink, and both Champagne and sparkling wine taste best when chilled. Instead of holding the bowl, pinch the stem between your index finger and thumb. Just remember: Always hold the glass by its stem. Maintain eye contact when clinking someone's glass. Otherwise, you risk seven years bad luck, according to the French superstition.

Remember to direct your gaze. While sipping your drink, you should direct your stare into your glass. It is impolite to look at another person while drinking if you are in conversation. Don't forget to make a toast—to anything or anyone—before you take your first sip!

Don't swirl the champagne in the glass. The French call this

'champagne battering', because swirling the bubbly in the glass will only succeed in compromising in thirty seconds the bubbles that took at least three years to produce. Don't be afraid to bury your nose in the glass before your first sip—so much of taste comes from smell. Have a taste and note the flavour. It is recommended that you drink a glass of water for each glass of Champagne consumed. It is a common perception that people become intoxicated more quickly from Champagne.

Waiting for the bubbles to dissipate in the mouth before swallowing also helps. Try it! You will prolong the enjoyment of your Champagne, and you'll feel much better tomorrow!

To reduce the risk of spilling or spraying any Champagne, open the Champagne bottle by holding the cork and rotating the bottle at an angle in order to ease out the stopper. The cork should be removed so the sound you hear is a soft 'sigh'. Removing the cork in this slow manner as opposed to popping it open by shaking the bottle vigorously also reduces the risks of killing someone in the room!

Step One: Tilt the bottle slightly, always pointing the bottle safely away from yourself or any other person; then untwist the metal loop to loosen the wire cage. According to experts, if you can remove the wire in five and a half twists, you are about to open a top quality bottle—'the real thing'.

Step Two: Remove the wire cage and foil wrapping while keeping a firm grip on the cork.

Step Three: Still holding the cork firmly, gently rotate the bottle (not the cork) with your other hand so the cork comes sliding, not popping, out.

Champagne is optimally poured by tilting the glass you're pouring into on a diagonal and allowing the wine to slide down the edge of the glass. This will prevent the carbonation from causing a head to quickly rise and just as quickly go flat.

Champagne should be filled to only half of a glass. A glass that is too heavy might result in an unladylike spill. And why let it warm up in the glass anyways?

Prevent dripping. When filling your glass, twist the bottle at the end of pouring. It also looks pretty fancy! ☺

