

FORTUNE

A first look at legendary champagne house Bollinger's upcoming hotel



Famed champagne house Bollinger is expanding into oenotourism with the construction of a new hospitality center as well as its first hotel. The expansion comes part of the company's business and sustainability innovation roadmap leading up to Bollinger's 200th anniversary in 2029.



The centerpiece of the new concept is the former house of Madame Elisabeth Bollinger, who was the head of the Champagne Bollinger business from 1941 to 1971, located in Aÿ, France, approximately 45 minutes by car from Reims, the largest city in the region.

The garden has been occasionally used to host events in the past, but it will become a place dedicated to welcoming champagne enthusiasts, with the expectation of hosting approximately 20,000 visitors annually after the grand opening.

Part of the inspiration for the hotel, especially, came from Bollinger's dedicated wine club membership, many of whom asked about not only visiting but staying at the winery, according to Charles-Armand de Belenet, managing director for Champagne Bollinger.

"We very often have discussions with them, and we have been meeting with them over dinner, and frequently the question is, 'So do you think it's going to be possible to come visit you and stay to your winery?' That's a question that we have frequently. So we started to think about it. And then we decided to open a new project," says De Belenet.



The renovated building will have floor-to-ceiling windows along the north side, which will provide more visibility into the cellar and improve the working environment. The extension of the cellar will also enable the house to offer more exclusive tasting and dining experiences for guests. De Belenet notes this will include organizing weekend and even week-long events dedicated to food and wine pairings, which could be experienced through lunch with the vineyard manager out in the vineyards, a master class with the house cellar master, or specially curated dinners with the house chef.



A critical cornerstone of the new edifice will be the creation of a cathedral-like cellar open to the vineyards, able to hold more than 5,000 228-liter barrels, making it one of the largest, if not the largest, cellar in the Champagne region.



Maison Dueil (on Rue de la Charte), which is part of the Bollinger estate, will be transformed into a 20-bedroom luxury boutique hotel, which will include a wellness area, a pool, meeting rooms equipped for seminars, and a large reception room (seating up to 200). A second dining room, with glass doors opening out onto the garden, can be set up to provide gastronomic experiences as well.



The company's plans are centered around safeguarding the characteristic style of Bollinger's champagnes but while also improving its work environment both around sustainability goals but also for its employees. Bollinger says it carries out a bi-annual company survey to identify possible areas of improvement and to adopt plans of action. "We have three top priorities, and the first priority is regarding our team," De Belenet says.



Looking forward to 2029, Bollinger is aiming to ensure 100% of its employees benefit from at least one training course annually to aid either professional or personal development as well as ensuring all employees participate in an annual training day concerning sustainability. Bollinger also plans to lead campaigns to raise awareness about responsible drinking.



The company has outlined even more specific goals to achieve more sustainable operations, all the more necessary as wine regions are increasingly affected by climate change each harvest seasons. By 2029, Bollinger plans to place the use of petrochemicals with 100% bio-sourced products, use lighter bottles (reducing the weight of the glass by 7%), reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 40%, and achieve 100% recycled and recyclable packaging.



Bollinger provided an update on its hospitality plans amid the release of the R.D. 2008 champagne, a special cuvée, or blend, grown only in the premier cru and grand cru vineyards (essentially the top tiers) of the region. (And for additional reference, champagne is a blend of pinot noir, chardonnay, and pinot meunier grapes.)

The grapes used to make this wine were harvested in 2008 and underwent a long maturation process before being bottled. The wine has a rich, golden color with hints of green and amber, reflecting its maturity and the high-quality grapes used to make it. On the nose, Bollinger R.D. 2008 has an array of aromas, including ripe fruit, honey, baked bread, and hints of nuts and spices. The wine has a full-bodied, creamy texture with a fine mousse and a long, complex finish. The Bollinger R.D. 2008 is a wine for special occasions and is best enjoyed chilled, paired with rich and flavorful dishes, such as roasted meats, mature cheese, and fruit tarts.



“Objectively, it’s a house. From a legal point of view, it’s a hotel, as you can rent and buy by the room,” De Belenet says. “But the objective is really to have a family house where we open the gates with a member of the staff, who is a unit with their guests and will be there for dinner.”

Construction for the Bollinger hotel and hospitality center started in 2022 and is expected to be completed by 2026. While anyone interested will be able to make a reservation at the hotel, first crack at reservations will be made available to Bollinger’s wine club members. Guests can book by the room, but the hotel is open to full buyouts as well.