



1922

CREATIONS

THEO FABERGÉ

CENTENARY YEAR



2022

*100 Years - Celebrating
Theo Fabergé's life on
26 September 2022
Written by
Lady Helen Wilkins*

Our congratulations to our dear leader, Philip Birkenstein who organised the event held in France instead of Russia this year – I wonder why!?

What a fantastic weekend that was, in Colombey-Les-Deux-Eglises, celebrating Theo's 100th birthday. Starting with our lovely little hotel, the Hostellerie la Montagne, and our wonderful chef Jean-Baptiste Natali - a young man with an amazing talent, not to mention a Michelin Star... the food was truly delicious and outstanding. I would love to steal him and take him back to New Zealand! I'm working on it.

Day 1

Guests arrived from all parts of the planet – 16 of us. At 6.30pm we met for a glass of Champagne, supplied from the vineyards of the Rapeneau family, by Jean-Rémy Rapeneau of Château de Bligny. A French 'rustic' dinner was served at the Hostellerie a little later and that's when I knew I wanted to take Jean-Baptiste home with me! Totally delicious. I could include Jean-Rémy too – a truly entertaining character, full of charisma and energy.



JEAN-BAPTISTE (LEFT) AND JEAN-RÉMY (RIGHT) IN
CHÂTEAU DE BLIGNY

Day 2



JEAN-RÉMY RAPENEAU OF CHÂTEAU DE BLIGNY
INTRODUCING US TO THE CHÂTEAU DE CIREY AND ITS
OWNERS

Next morning, after a free-for-all breakfast we visited Château de Cirey - a lived-in castle. Jean-Rémy was there to introduce us to the charming owners, the Count and Countess of Salignac-Fénelon. This was a very special moment; and learning about Voltaire, who lived there during his 15-year-long love affair with Émilie le Tonnelier de Breteuil, the Marquise du Châtelet (1734-49) with the kind permission of her husband the Marquis... was such a romantic story. Voltaire repaired the castle, added a wing and amongst other additions built a small theatre in the 'attic' where he rehearsed his plays.



VOLTAIRE'S THEATRE ON THE TOP FLOOR OF
CHÂTEAU DE CIREY. 1735

I would like to have taken many photos there, but it was a private home after all, so that was not an option. However, it was a fascinating morning, wandering through the ancient halls and rooms of the 18th century castle, and then around their gardens which were truly lovely, and photos were allowed.



CHÂTEAU DE CIREY



JEAN-RÉMY, COUNTESS OF SALIGNAC-FÉNELON, OUR
LEADER, PHILIP, BIRKENSTEIN, THE COUNT OF
SALIGNAC-FÉNELON AND OUR TALL FRIEND COEN, THE
MAN WHO INTRODUCED PHILIP TO JEAN-RÉMY:
OUTSIDE CHÂTEAU DE CIREY

Day 2 Afternoon

From here we had a coach ride to the next family-owned Château - where Jean-Rémy introduced us to his father, his brother Paul and a fairy-tale castle to dream of.



CHÂTEAU DE BLIGNY, BUILT IN 1773

Champagne tasting was heady – grown and bottled on the property and sampled down in the cellars which are wall to wall deer heads, a grand place for celebrating the success of a hunt – or a birthday or whatever.

This was followed by a 'light lunch' in the cellar dining room of *Château de Bligny*, then a walk through their amazing vineyard and the very special Clos - a walled section of the vineyard with six cépages (varieties of grapes) growing within - 'wow' in a word. The walk was supposed to 'settle' our *light lunch*... Then later, to taste the new Champagne made from those six varieties of grapes was going to be a very special occasion.

But a notable point of the day was visiting all the hunting dogs and the huge hunting-eagles. What handsome birds, waiting to do their master's bidding. I could go on and on but there were more surprises to come.



THE CELLARS OF CHÂTEAU DE BLIGNY

Day 2 Dinner

That night was back at the Hostellerie la Montagne – a *Sparkling Twenties* dinner – almost everyone wore feather boas and Twenties-style outfits. Little did we realise why! Theo had designed the *Sparkling 20's Egg* - a stunningly gorgeous turquoise creation with Twenties-styled fans adorning it in 23 kt gold and precious stones. Tonight was to be the *World Unveiling* of this creation, the surprise inside being two tiny gold wine goblets and a tiny gold Champagne bottle on a gold tray.



SPARKLING 20'S EGG



ULI AND ANGELA PFEIFER

Once again, the Champagne came from the vines of *Château de Bligny* which surrounded the castle and could be seen for miles across the country.



SPARKLING 20'S PENDANT BY THEO FABERGÉ

Not only were these unveiled but Philip had yet another surprise for us - a beautiful, inverted fan-shaped pendant matching those set around the Egg, with 22 cut rubies (Theo's favourite stones) to celebrate 1922, his birth year, and four brilliant cut diamonds representing Theo as the 4th generation of the Fabergé family working in the jewellery business.

Day 3 In the morning...

Next day we were invited back to Château de Bligny in the late afternoon, for a full tour of that castle, but not before we had a morning walk to the memorial museum of Charles de Gaulle who had lived in the village of Colombey-Les-Deux-Eglises and in November 1970 was laid to rest by the lovely church, a short walk down from the hugely high cross of Lorraine, which can be seen from all over the planes of Champagne-Ardenne.

The cross with two arms was adopted as a symbol of Free France in July 1940 and the historic monument was inaugurated in 1972 by President Pompidou. It is 44.3m high and made of reinforced concrete coated in pink granite weighing 950 tonnes. It was paid for by subscription which raised 5.5 million Francs. Thank you, Google!

Day 3 Afternoon into the evening...

The celebration of Theo's 100th birthday continued over the weekend with toasts and speeches, including a further Champagne tasting and yet another dinner - again created by our chef from the Hostellerie la Montagne but held in Château de Bligny.

This was the actual date of Theo's birthday – 26th September 1922. The *Theo Fabergé Gala Centenary Celebration Dinner* – Black Tie etc. Of course, seeing Jean-Rémy again and his brother Paul, plus their mother and again Monsieur Rapeneau, was very special as they warmly welcomed us back into their home.



THE DINING ROOM AT CHÂTEAU DE BLIGNY FOR THE GALA DINNER

The Champagne flowed as we were shown through the various rooms of the 'house' – from the splendid dining room, right up to the very special top rooms which held an incredible collection of rifles, guns, knives, and countless stag heads, (this family is a true hunting family – deer, wild boar, rabbits, pheasants etc.)



The dining room, with its 19th century artwork on the ceiling, walls and chandelier took us back to that era; we felt very humbled, but at the same time rather like royalty, with Mr and Mrs Rapeneau joining us – as seen in the photo above, standing to the right.

And let's not forget the unforgettable wall-to-wall shelves of over 1000 Champagne flutes. I was in Seventh Heaven, I have my own little collection and absolutely love them, but one of our group, Henry, was on Cloud Nine when he saw the rifle collection. For an army-man, this was Heaven on earth, and it was all we could do to draw him away for dinner.



CABINET OF BEAUTIFUL CHAMPAGNE FLUTES

This is just one of the many cabinets filled with stunning Champagne flutes and glasses – including pieces by Lalique and Daume, *together with the Château's magnificent neo-gothic conservatories stand testament to the village's history as a center of glassmaking. Until 1881 Bligny was home to the headquarters of one of the Aube's leading glass manufacturers.* Thank you, Google, again!

This is a tiny example of the countless cabinets of guns of every type, knives and all sorts of hunting gear held in the castle. This is believed to be one of the largest collections in Europe.



Finally, Philip's last surprise. The unveiling of a special Champagne coaster designed by Theo some years ago and which had been stored away for a special moment. That special moment had arrived. Philip presented it to Jean-Rémy, who had just opened the Château's latest Champagne - *Clos du Château de Bligny, 6 Cépages.*

The bottle sat perfectly in the coaster, and the label on the bottle was of a shiny metal, designed to match the coaster. It was a real pleasure to see the two 'unveilings' : the coaster with its swags - as Theo always included in his works, and the new Champagne which had taken so many years to produce.



SUSAN GARDAM WITH SYLVIA AND GEOFFREY BIRCH



A VERY PROUD PHILIP DISPLAYING THE COASTER AND CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE, WITH JEAN-RÉMY IN THE BACKGROUND.



PHILIP BIRKENSTEIN ADDING THE COASTER TO THE CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE...
ONCE THE BOTTLE IS ON THE COASTER, THE EGG IS FORMED

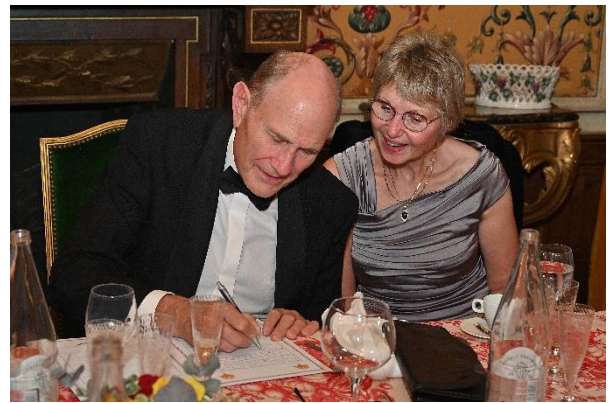


PAUL RAPENEAU SERVING MORE CHAMPAGNE.

*Photographs from the
Gala Dinner*







Day 4... Morning

It was sad leaving the Hostellerie and all our newly made friends. Jean-Baptiste Natali was tempted but decided New Zealand was a bridge too far.