

World's oldest champagne uncorked

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As the champagne was poured, a thick, nose-wrinkling bouquet could be smelled (AFP: Jonathan Nackstrand)

Wine experts have popped the corks of two bottles of champagne salvaged from the bottom of the Baltic Sea, where they had lain in a sunken ship for nearly 200 years.

On stage in front of some 100 journalists and wine enthusiasts gathered in the capital of Finland's island province of Aaland, they eased the fragile corks from the dark brown bottles - one from the house of Veuve-Clicquot and the other from the now extinct house of Juglar.

As the contents were poured into rows of waiting glasses, a thick, nose-wrinkling bouquet could be smelled several metres away.

"Bottles kept at the bottom of the sea are better kept than in the finest

wine cellars," one of the world's foremost champagne experts, Richard Juhlin, told reporters.

Mr Juhlin described the Juglar as "more intense and powerful, mushroomy," and the Veuve-Clicquot as more like Chardonnay, with notes of "linden blossoms and lime peels".

"Madame Clicquot herself must have tasted this same batch," Francois Hautekeur, a Veuve-Clicquot representative, said, referring to Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin, who reigned over the famous house.

The historic estate announced yesterday it had discovered that three or four bottles of its produce were found among the 168 salvaged bottles.

Mr Hautekeur and other employees of the winemaker have been assisting Aaland historians in identifying and dating the champagne, which originates from the second quarter of the 19th century, making it probably the world's oldest.

Replicating history

The wreck also held an undisclosed number of bottles of what is believed to be the world's oldest drinkable beer.

The Aaland authorities intend to sell some of it to brewers who can recreate it from the same yeast root.

"I don't care so much about the champagne," Christian Ekstroem, the diver who discovered the wreck's cargo, said.

"[Champagne](#) we can only sell or drink up, but ... we can use the beer to produce something unique and local. It's historically meaningful."

Mr Ekstroem, in addition to being the province's foremost diver, is also the manager of a pub for a local microbrewery, called Stallhagen.

He said one of the beer [bottles](#) cracked open on the boat's deck, and the dark, ale-like liquid frothed up like any fresh brew, indicating the yeast was incredibly still alive.

He has tasted the beer and says he would be extremely disappointed if the authorities in the autonomous Finnish province did not give Stallhagen the opportunity to produce the beer locally.

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