

THE ART OF SABERING

A Timeless Tradition in Champagne Celebrations

Champagne! In victory, one deserves it, and in defeat, one needs it!

- Napoleon Bonaparte

The sight of a champagne bottle being opened with a swift slice of a sword is a grand gesture that exudes confidence and celebration. For those who have successfully sabered a bottle, it's an accomplishment tied to a time-honored tradition. For others, the idea provokes a mix of excitement and anxiety. But what exactly is sabering, and where did this practice originate? And how can you master it without risking shards of glass in your drink? This guide explores the history and art of sabering, offering a step-by-step method to ensure your success.

A HISTORICAL GESTURE ROOTED IN VICTORY

The practice of sabering dates back to the Napoleonic era, steeped in legend. According to popular accounts, we owe this dramatic gesture to Napoleon Bonaparte and his army of Hussars. The

Hussars, a dashing group of light cavalry soldiers known for their bravery, were said to celebrate victories by slicing the tops off champagne bottles with their sabres.

Some stories even suggest that these soldiers used their sabering skills to charm Madame Clicquot, the widow who famously took over her husband's Champagne business and revolutionized the industry. Whether fact or fiction, these tales add a sense of romance and daring to sabering, making it a symbol of celebration and success.

THE MODERN-DAY SABRAGE

Today, sabering remains a celebrated tradition, especially in France where it is honored by the Confrérie du Sabre d'Or, or the Brotherhood of the Golden Sword. This formal group takes the art of sabrage seriously, with members ceremoniously opening bottles of champagne with their sabres while donning traditional attire.

While the Hussars and their battlefield



celebrations are long gone, sabering has found a place in modern festivities, from weddings to New Year's Eve parties, captivating onlookers with its blend of elegance and bravado.

MASTERING THE SABRAGE TECHNIQUE

If you're eager to try sabering yourself, it's important to approach the

technique with both respect and caution. Here's how to do it right:

1. Choose Your Bottle Wisely

Select a bottle of Champagne or locally produced Cap Classique for best results. These have the ideal level of pressure for sabering. Cava and Prosecco, while delightful, generally have less internal pressure and are less effective for this technique.



2. Select Your Weapon

A sharp kitchen knife can work just as well as a traditional sabre, provided it has a good weight and sturdy blade. Ensure whatever you use is sharp enough.

3. Chill the Bottle

Chill the bottle thoroughly by placing it in the freezer or submerging the neck in a bucket of ice for 15-20 minutes. A well-chilled bottle breaks more cleanly

and reduces the amount of bubbly lost upon impact.

4. Prepare the Bottle

Remove the foil and wire cage that secures the cork. Locate the seam of the bottle - a subtle line running vertically from top to bottom.

5. Position Yourself and the Bottle

Hold the bottle at a 30-45 degree angle, ensuring the neck points away from you and anyone nearby. Place your thumb



in the punt (the indent at the bottom) and extend your forefingers along the neck. Avoid wrapping your entire hand around the bottle's neck to prevent injury.

6. The Sabering Motion

Rest the blade flat against the bottle's seam and run it gently along the seam a few times. When ready, pull the blade back toward your body, apply pressure, and then swiftly thrust it along the seam toward the bottle's lip. A confident flick of the wrist should do the trick.

7. Check and Serve

If executed correctly, the neck should snap off cleanly, taking the cork with it. Before pouring, inspect the bottle for any glass shards. Once

satisfied, pour the champagne and enjoy your success.

CELEBRATING TRADITION

Sabering is more than just a party trick; it's a ritual connecting us with history and the celebratory spirit of past generations. Whether marking a milestone or adding drama to a gathering, mastering sabrage is sure to impress and delight. With the right preparation and practice, you can make sabering part of your champagne experience. After all, as Napoleon Bonaparte said, "Champagne! In victory, one deserves it, and in defeat, one needs it!" 🍾

by **bernie hellberg jr**
/photography by **unsplash.com**