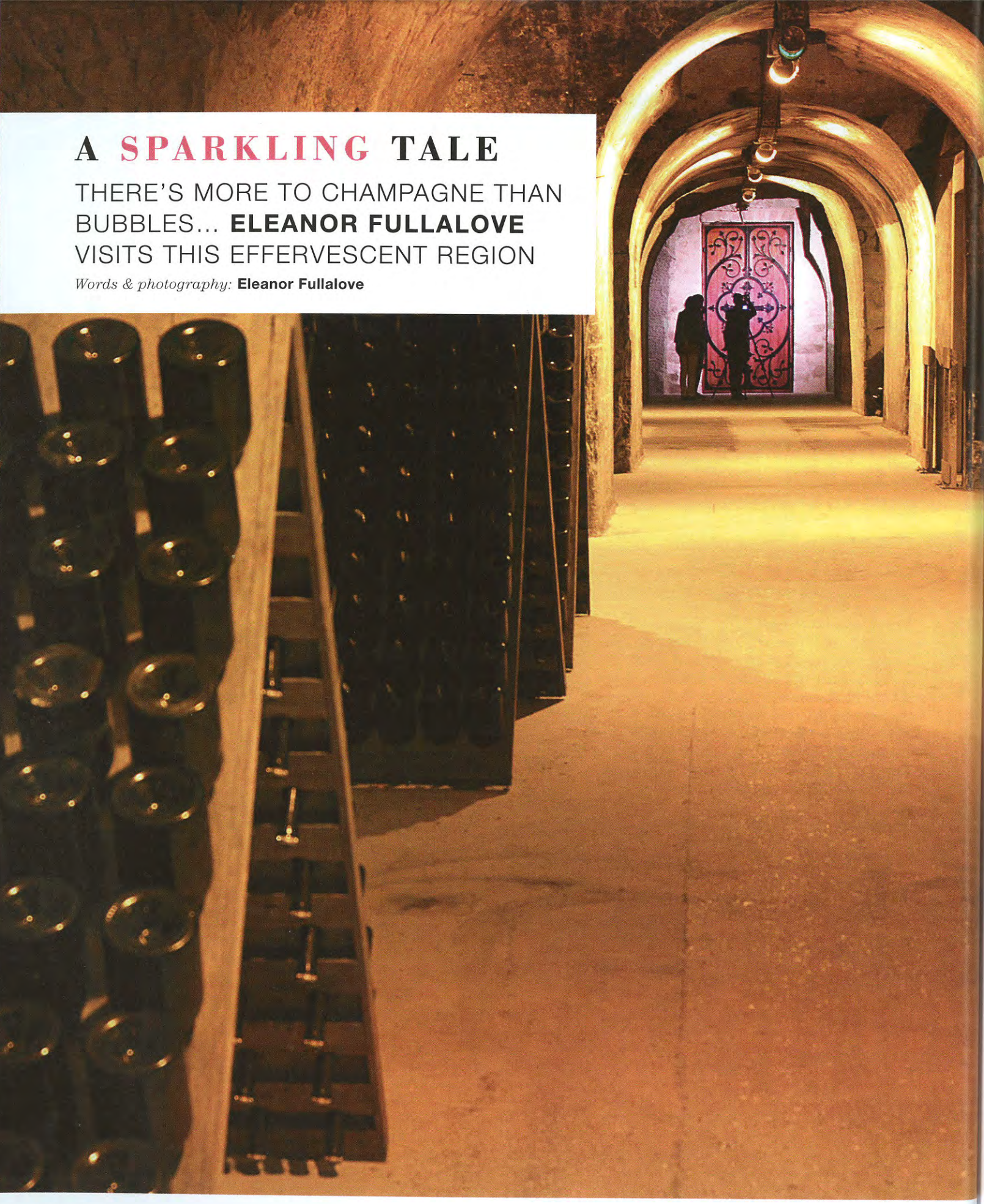
A SPARKLING TALE

THERE'S MORE TO CHAMPAGNE THAN BUBBLES... **ELEANOR FULLALOVE** VISITS THIS EFFERVESCENT REGION

Words & photography: **Eleanor Fullalove**



Try your hand (carefully) at the art of *sabrage* at the champagne house of Achille Princier

show. Moët & Chandon, on the other hand, offer visitors the chance to see inside the home of its founders, Messieurs Moët and Chandon, instead. As for the lesser-known Achille Princier, an introductory course to *sabrage* (the art of opening a bottle of champagne with a ceremonial sword) is available on request.

By the time a champagne tasting is suggested at the end of your cellar tour, every aspect from colour and aroma to flavour will have been covered – after all, this is a drink that deserves our full attention. It is a multi-sensory experience with no two blends the same, even when produced under one label. Weather conditions can be unpredictable, but even the way that one of these wines is served can create subtle differences when looking at the way the bubbles simply rise to the top of the glass.

Much like the Champagne name itself, which is protected by European law, the harvesting of champagne grapes is subject to strict controls. It starts between the end of August and late October each year and once the harvest is underway, all the grapes must be collected within a window of about ten days. Mechanical harvesting is forbidden, so the grapes are hand-picked, which is why growers such as Champagne Abel Jobart between Épernay and Reims promote 'harvest experience days' for

*"It is a **multi-sensory** experience with no two blends the same even under one label"*

CHAMPAGNE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

If you're visiting Champagne country, here is our at-a-glance checklist of useful places and information

CHAMPAGNE HOUSES

Champagne Mercier,
68-70 Avenue de Champagne
Épernay
www.champagnemercier.fr/en

Champagne Abel Jobart,
4 Rue de la Sous-Préfecture
Sarcy
www.champagne-abeljobart.com

Champagne Achille Princier,
48 Rue de la Chapelle,
Cerseuil
www.achille-princier.com

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Le Café du Palais, Reims
14 Place Myron Herrick
www.cafedupalais.fr

C Comme, Épernay
8 Rue Gambetta
www.c-comme.fr

WHERE TO STAY

Les Crayères, Reims
64 Boulevard Henry Vasnier
www.lescrayeres.com
(see our review p84)

Hostellerie La Briqueterie,
4 Route de Sézanne, Vinay
www.labriqueterie.fr

THEMED TOURS

Balloon flights in Champagne
www.franceballoons.com

Combine several regions in a bespoke wine tour
www.wine-tours-france.com

Canon Bruce Hawkins is running three Battlefields and Bubbles tours this year
www.reveillebattlefieldtours.co.uk

DON'T MISS

Les Habits de Lumière, Épernay
13-15 December 2013
Celebrate along the Avenue de Champagne
habitsdelumiere.epernay.fr/en

Alain Reynaud
Self-taught photographer from Nice, best-known for his *Monstres des Vignes* vineyard photo studies
www.monstresdesvignes.com

FAST FACTS

- Champagne is a 330 million bottles a year business
- **Every two seconds worldwide, a bottle of Champagne is opened**
- The US is the second largest export market for Champagne, behind the UK
- **Champagne bottles are named after biblical kings: Jeroboam (four bottles) and Nebuchadnezzar (20 bottles)**
- At 170 years old, the world's oldest bottle of drinkable Champagne, made by Veuve Clicquot, was sold in 2011 for €30,000. It was rescued from a shipwreck in the Baltic Sea in 2010.

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