



Black and white photo of Douglas Riddle by J. Edward Brown, inspired by Yves Saint Laurent.



Parisian Persuasion

The story of the Bittners Champagne Room

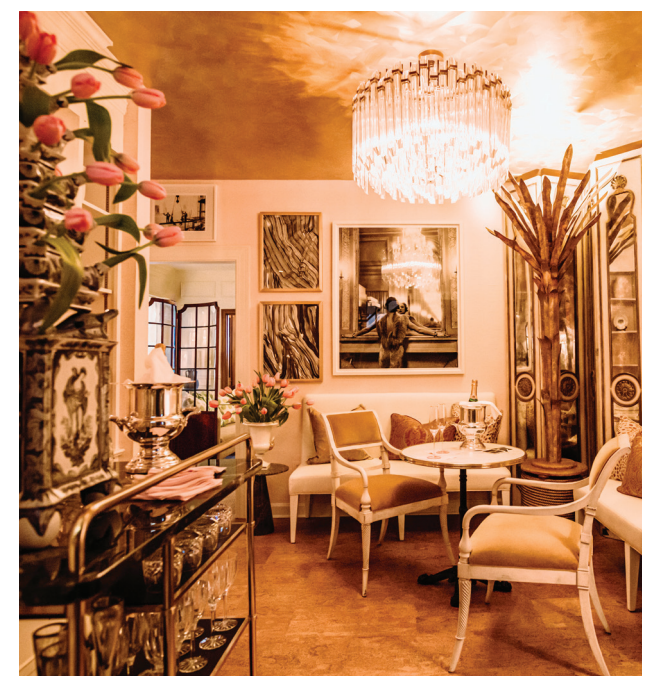
By **ELIZABETH SCINTA** | Photos by **ANDREA HUTCHINSON**

After trips to Paris Fashion Week in his younger years, Douglas Riddle, the president and COO of Bittners, fell in love with the magic of Paris and the bubbly, deliciousness of champagne. He knew this was an experience he needed to recreate in his hometown of Louisville, KY and thus The Champagne Room at Bittners was born. It is a place of celebration and to remind you that all occasions are worth raising a glass of champagne to. To learn more about his inspiration for this special room and his love of bubbly, we asked Riddle to share the details of this story with us.

What was your inspiration behind the Champagne Room at Bittners?

When I was in the fashion business, I always attended the Paris and Milan shows during fashion week and traveled with my boss at the time, Beverly Rice. She took me under her wing and we stayed at this hotel, the Castille Paris, which was on Avenue Rue Cambon and is behind the Ritz Carlton. There's a little alleyway from our hotel that you could cut through to get to the Ritz and in the back of the hotel was a bar called Bar Hemingway. It was named after Ernest Hemingway and, back in the day, Coco Chanel would leave her boutique on

Rue Cambon and sneak into the Ritz to have drinks with Hemmingway. There's a whole history behind those two. Mrs. Rice thought we should celebrate the beauty of Paris and our successful trip each time – we went three times a year – by having a glass of champagne at Bar Hemingway. The experience took place in my 20s and I loved the idea of it. She was a wonderful person and believed that it's important to celebrate the things we accomplish. From that, I developed an appreciation for champagne, and not just the fact that I loved the taste of it, but also the story and romanticism behind it.





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Do you have a favorite place to enjoy champagne other than at Bittners?

I really don't, I can drink champagne anywhere. It's my go-to if I'm out and about for dinner, I like to have a glass of champagne first. I'm not a big drinker so sometimes that's as far as it goes with me, but I'd prefer to have champagne over most things.

We use our space at Bittners, though, for so many things so we can continue this tradition of celebration. We designed all these beautiful spaces for our clients but I thought we never really had a beautiful space of our own where the employees could celebrate. We have a lunchroom but it's the farthest thing from attractive. The Bittners

Champagne Room has developed into somewhere we've hosted clients' birthday parties, employee anniversaries and baby showers. Once we all get vaccinated and get the approval from the CDC, then we'll probably have a little champagne toast that we've all been fortunate enough to survive COVID-19 and celebrate the future. We try to use it and not just let it sit there. It's worked well for business too. Some of our clients have seen it and loved it, so we try to give them a touch of it in their properties.

What's the atmosphere of the Bittners Champagne Room?

I think it has a soft and comfortable side to it. We did all these iconic black

and white photographs from legendary photographers, like Helmut Newton and Richard Avedon. We have some really eccentric ones, like the family up on top of the pyramid having a picnic, and the artist that's painting a horse and, instead of going out to the horse, they brought the horse into his house.

The eccentric side of the photographs made me think of all the people at Bittners because we have such a diverse group. My craftsman and cabinet makers think differently than the designers, and the designers from the project managers. Sometimes, when you meet with each of the divisions as I do, you can see the diversity and how eclectic the Bittners team can be. The photographs make me think of all of us.

Champagne: celebratory or any time?

It's certainly an anytime drink for me! I would hate to have to wait for a celebration for the next time I have a glass of champagne. I think once you get used to it, especially when it's the right temperature and it's cold on a summer day, there's nothing better.

What is your favorite kind of champagne or champagne cocktail?

I really don't do champagne cocktails because I like the taste of champagne. There's a Veuve Clicquot and a Moët Chandon that I do sometimes. There's this one by Nicholas Feuillatte

that's good and not really expensive. For mimosas, I usually use Korbel Champagne or prosecco. I'm not one to pay a lot of money for a bottle of champagne, so I've found the ones that work and aren't very expensive.

What do you recommend for someone else wanting to recreate their own champagne room?

I would recommend that you make sure you pay attention to the comfort and the seating. Before you know it, when you get in there with a friend, you end up being there longer than you think. We thought we would have this little champagne room and we'd do a toast and then we'd all work our way out

and use different parts of the showroom but that's really not the case. You end up staying there because it's so cozy. We utilize the lighting well and there's an aged mirror that reflects people so you feel like there are more people in there than there really are. Make sure that it's comfortable, but also sexy, because I think that's sort of what champagne does. ♥

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