

The Deviation Road Christmas riddle.



What was once living, but now dead, yet travels faster than you can blink?

As many of you that visit the cellar door know, there are many, many stages to traditional method sparkling production. One of the most spectacular of these stages is the process of 'disgorging'. This is the point that the yeast lees are removed from the bottle leaving it clear and ready for its cork, muselet and drinking!

So, what are yeast lees and why are they in the bottle?

Going back a step, when we bottle our sparkling wine it doesn't yet have any bubbles. Instead a specially crafted still wine is bottled with the addition of yeast and sugar to create the second fermentation in the bottle. The bottle is sealed using a crown seal – just like a beer cap. Once the yeast have done their job converting the sugar to alcohol and CO₂ (the bubbles!) and we have aged the sparkling for a minimum of two years, it is time to clarify the wine and remove the yeast – now called lees. At this stage, we 'riddle' the lees down to the neck of the bottle ready for disgorging. If we didn't remove the yeast lees, the wine would be very cloudy, and gush when opened losing much of the precious liquid inside.

Riddling is a traditionally a long and manual process, taking 21 days whereby each bottle is rotated by hand each day. The yeast are swept into a trail, slowly making their way into the neck as the bottle is inclined during the process. To help this along, we add a small amount of bentonite during bottling to help gather the yeast and slide them down the inside of the bottle. The bentonite is removed with the lees at disgorging.

The bottles shown on the riddling racks below are the [2008 Beltana Blanc de Blancs](#) which has been released after 10 years on lees:



Bottles at 6 o'clock



Bottles turned to 3 o'clock



Inclined bottles

DEVIATION ROAD ADELAIDE HILLS WINE

At the end of the riddling cycle, there is a small thimble sized deposit of lees inside the crown seal. If the bottle is accidentally turned upright, the lees will fall back into the wine making it cloudy again. To prevent this happening during disgorging, we freeze the neck of the bottle at -20, creating an ice block which then permits the bottle to be put upright without losing the lees sediment.



In modern times, automatic riddling machines have been designed to riddle bottles in as fast as three days, as they can carry out about six rotations in a day. Believe me - and my elbows – this is a brilliant aid in the winery! Here at Deviation Road, Large format (magnums) and small batches are still hand riddled.



Once the bottles have been properly riddled, they can be disgorged. This is done in the cool room with the bottles chilled to 2°. The beer cap is removed and the pressure inside the bottle (approximately 6 bar, the same pressure as a bus tyre) blows out the yeast lees in a very impressive explosion! And this is the answer to the Christmas riddle!

