

ESSENTIALS
EXCLUSIVE

Toast of the town



Click through to see Federer's style on and off the court

Features Editor **Bernd Fischer** met up with **ROGER FEDERER** in Paris to share a glass of bubbly with one of the most decorated sports stars of our time



ON A RECENT SPRING EVENING at the historic Plaza Athénée, Roger Federer stepped into the lavish hotel suite looking exactly how I'd expect him to - elegant and so effortlessly executed. He's dressed in a navy tracksuit top, with the sleeves pushed up, and wearing a pair of slim-fit, slightly cropped trousers in the same shade of blue. His choice in shoes completed the look: black loafers with gold detailing ('Gucci,' I told myself, as if I was at all surprised). While Federer's innate sense of style isn't what brought us to Paris, it has undoubtedly become part of his appeal, along with his reputation as a generous and down-to-earth personality.

How does the greatest tennis player of all time, with an exceptional fashion sense to match, stay as humble as the world has clearly witnessed him to be? When asked, he seemed genuinely taken aback.

'I don't know,' he told me, seated on a rose-pink Louis XIV chair. The entire setup is, aptly, fit for a king. 'I think my upbringing definitely helped me. My parents are very normal people with normal backgrounds, so that has definitely shaped me. Same with my wife, who also comes from a very humble background,' he explained.

Federer speaks using his hands, and his body language shows that he's very much present in the conversation. It's a relief from the often scripted responses to questions from disinterested and detached individuals of considerable fame that our line of work affords us the pleasure - or displeasure - of meeting.

'In Switzerland, I think we tend not to want to rise above

one another, I think we all like to be pretty much the same,' he added. 'So I think that has helped to keep me grounded.'

As humble as a response that may be, Federer has demonstrably risen to the top. The professional tennis player is in the French capital, together with Moët & Chandon, the luxury Champagne house of which he has been a brand ambassador since 2012, to celebrate 20 years of his exceptional tennis career.

Despite his modest demeanour, Federer is refreshingly direct when it comes to his professional achievements. He lists his first Wimbledon - and consequently his first Grand Slam - singles title in 2003 as probably his biggest career highlight. Also noteworthy

to Federer was winning his first Australian Open a year later, propelling him to the world's number one spot - also a first for the Swiss tennis star. But it wouldn't be his last.

'Getting to world number one again this year, at 36 years old, was unbelievable for me,' added Federer. 'All these years later, to have this moment again, has been beautiful.'

But Federer is intent on making it clear that reaching the top (and what an understatement that is) doesn't happen perchance; it's nothing short of hard work, dedication and sacrifice. 'There were also moments in my life when I didn't feel like I was improving so much anymore,' he admitted. 'But in sports,

I feel you can always become a little bit better.'

With much media speculation at the time of this meeting, it was eventually revealed that Federer would not be playing at Roland-Garros this year. The sports icon was in Paris only for the Moët & Chandon event held later that evening in his honour, and he'd be off to Zürich the very next day to attend a Roger Federer Foundation board meeting.

'I became a global Unicef ambassador, but I also wanted to do something that I stood for,' said Federer on starting his foundation. 'And travelling to South Africa,' he explained, gesturing to me when he mentioned the country, 'with my mom who was born and grew up there, and with me going there on vacation a lot and having seen poverty, hinted to me that I wanted to do something with kids.'

Federer also acknowledged that he was inspired by the likes of Andre Agassi and other tennis greats who ran charities. 'This year we're going to achieve the goal of supporting one million children in the last 15 years with better quality education.'

Later that evening, in the gardens of Michelin-starred >>



chef Yannick Alléno's Pavillon Ledoyen, guests – ranging from tennis champions Stefan Edberg and Tommy Haas, to Virgil Abloh, the newly appointed artistic director of Louis Vuitton menswear – gathered in celebration for Moët & Chandon's special tribute event to Federer.

'I was very proud of course, to say the least, when Moët & Chandon approached me,' Federer had said of the partnership earlier. 'Scarlett Johansson, I thought, did a wonderful job before me, so I was very flattered when they went from a movie star to a tennis player from Switzerland.'

Dressed in a navy blue suit, the tennis star listened as Bernard Arnault, the chief executive officer of the multinational luxury goods company LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy), praised Federer in a lengthy speech. (Arnault's mere presence at the event speaks volumes, as the CEO rarely makes public appearances.)

With formalities aside, Moët & Chandon unveiled a new, limited-edition, black-tinted, magnum-sized bottle it calls 'Greatness since 1998'. There are only 20 numbered editions of the bottle made, each wrapped in a handcrafted leather band resembling a tennis grip. Inside, there's champagne of course: the house's brut from its harvest of 1998.

Once the leather band embossed with Federer's signature is unwrapped, a second handwritten signature greets you on the label. Hot-stamped in gold on the inside of the bottle's tie, another exquisite detail: 'Dreams do come true,' reads the quote by Federer, proudly uttered earlier in February when he became number one for a second time.

'Surreal, a little bit,' said Federer of the customised bottle. 'Especially all that for charity. These are things you don't aim for when you're a little boy.' ❧

» Priced at €19 998 per bottle, 100% of the profits from the sale of Moët & Chandon 'Greatness since 1998' is donated to the Roger Federer Foundation. Available exclusively at Moët Hennessy's boutique (via e-mail at rogerfederer20@moet.com)