The International Wine Review
December 2008

Report # 14  The World of Sparkling Wines and Champagne

Introduction

Champagne is the original sparkling wine. As discussed in our Report # 9 Champagne, it still is the benchmark by which all sparkling wines are judged. However, unlike 200 years ago, today Champagne is not the only sparkling wine. In this report, the International Wine Review explores the world of sparkling wines, from Argentina to Australia in the New World, from Greece to Spain in Europe, and from several regions in France, including, of course, Champagne.

Our tasting of over 250 sparkling wines and Champagne uncovers New World and European sparkling wines of exceptional quality while at the same time confirming Champagne’s reputation for producing the most interesting, complex sparkling wines in the world. High quality sparkling wines can be found in several regions—Anderson Valley, McLaren Vale, Penedes, Franciacorta, Sussex and Virginia, among others. They’re made from both the traditional French varietals and indigenous varietals. Several different processes are used to make sparkling wines, but the best are made with what’s known as the méthode champenoise. A list of the top sparkling wines from our tasting appears on p. 8.

Our Report # 9 Champagne examined in extensive detail the intricacies of Champagne production, the styles of Champagne, and matching food with Champagne. That issue is available to subscribers on www.i-winereview.com. Sparkling wines offer a new world of flavors and aromas that expand the potential uses and possibilities for food pairing. In this issue, we provide a guide to help the consumer understand the various types and styles of sparkling wines and Champagne in order to better match wines with consumer preferences, as well as their pocketbooks.

In what follows, we try to create some order out of the polyglot world of sparkling wine by assessing how geographic origin, carbonation methods, grapes and vinification methods affect the style and quality of sparkling wine. We identify the factors which contribute to the quality of sparkling wine, offer recommendations on how to taste champagne and sparkling wine, and how to pair sparkling wine with food. In our tasting notes, we identify numerous sparkling wines that merit our readers’ serious attention, for reasons of quality, uniqueness, or value. In terms of quality, it’s difficult to beat Champagne, the origin of most of our highest rated wines. However, we also found some surprisingly good wines from other regions of the world and great values as well.

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Sparkling Wines and Champagne: A Consumer’s Guide

The sparkling wine world is complex and not very easy for the consumer to navigate. One way of understanding this world is by region and country of origin. We follow this convention below in reporting the tasting notes. However, there are a few other key signposts of which the savvy consumer should be aware.

The first of these signposts is the color of the wine. Color is an indicator of style, not quality. Light, almost transparent sparkling wines are a good predictor of light fruit flavors. Gold-colored sparkling wines often indicate both extensive oak and bottle aging that contributes to toast and oxidized notes. Rose-colored sparkling wines are often fruity with distinct red fruit aromas and flavors. And red-colored sparkling wines—found in Australia, Italy, and South Africa—resemble a fizzy red wine. The consumer can’t always see the color through the bottle, which is one reason we state the wine’s color in our tasting notes.

The second of these signposts is the production process. Champagne and high quality sparkling wine in most other parts of the world are made using a process resembling méthode champenoise. In Spain this method is called metodo tradicional. In South Africa it’s called method cap classique. In Italy it’s called metodo classico. And in the US, it is again called méthode champenoise. In contrast, sparkling wines which do not include one of the above labels is most likely made by the Charmat or other production method that is less costly but also yields a somewhat less refined beverage. We discuss production methods in more detail in the report and in Annex I.

The third of these signposts is the varietals used to make the base wine. Here the distinction is between sparkling wines made with the traditional varieties used to make Champagne and those made with indigenous grape varieties. Most sparkling wine in the New World—the U.S., New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, South America—is made using these traditional varietals. However, within Europe indigenous varietals are widely used, and some of these indigenous varietals—in Austria, France, Greece, and Italy—produce very fine wines, albeit different from the sparkling wines made from Champagne varietals. Even among Champagne varietals there are significant differences in flavor, with Blanc de Noirs, or Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier based wines, often having distinct cherry and other red fruit flavors and aromas, while Blanc de Blancs, or Chardonnay based wines, often having pear, apple, and melon flavors and aromas.

The fourth signpost the sparkling wine traveler should notice is style, in particular, a fruity style versus an autolytic style, which is to say a wine with distinct notes of yeast, lees, and nuts. Aside from reading our tasting notes, there are two main ways of predicting the style and taste of a sparkling wine. One way is to observe whether the wine carries a vintage or not. A vintage sparkling wine or Champagne is often—certainly not always—an indicator of longer aging on the lees. Another way to predict style is the color of the wine as noted above. A darker colored wine is more likely to be autolytic in style than a lighter colored wine. Which style is appropriate for the consumer depends on tastes, the occasion, and food.

Finally, the fifth signpost the consumer will certainly notice is price. As our tastings reveal, price and quality tend to be highly correlated. On the other hand, there are numerous values in sparkling wines where the quality is unusually high given the price. Vintage Champagnes and Champagne-like sparkling wines can easily cost over $50, while fruity, friendly sparklers like Asti from Italy, much Cava from Spain, and inexpensive wines like Gallo’s Barefoot Bubbly from California often cost under $10. Obviously, the price one is prepared to pay depends on the occasion, the food, and the thickness of one’s pocketbook.
Types and Styles of Sparkling Wine


Champagne

Champagne is a sparkling wine produced in the Champagne region of France. The Champagne Appellation (AOC) consists of over 84,000 acres of vines spread over five departments and includes 322 villages, each classified and rated according to its soil profile and the quality of the grapes produced. The AOC strictly regulates all aspects of Champagne production. The grapes used in champagne are restricted to Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier (and other minor grapes), and the production process for both vintage and non-vintage champagne follows the méthode champenoise. A detailed description of the process is provided in Annex I.

Champagne is produced by growers, cooperatives, and producer houses. These producers all seek to produce quality Champagne but in slightly different ways. The primary goals of producer houses are to achieve consistency and maintain the house style. These objectives are largely achieved through sourcing fruit and base wines from diverse sources and through the skill of their winemaker in creating the assemblage or blend. It is largely the diversity of the base wines and the art of blending that distinguish larger house Champagnes from grower Champagne. Henriot, Gosset, Louis Roederer and Pol Roger are among the many top Champagne houses reviewed here. Many others are reviewed in the i-WineReview’s Report #9 Champagne.

Grower Champagne, or as importer Terry Theise calls it, “farmer fizz”, is an expression of the terroir rather than the blending skills of the winemaker. At their best, these Champagnes are distinctive, expressive of their terroir, harmonious, and display great finesse. Growers represented by Terry Theise such as Gaston Chiquet, René Geoffroy, Varnier-Fanniere, and Pierre Larmandier and others represented by Roanoke Valley Wine Company such as Pascal and Fabrice Agrapart, Jerome Dehours, and Pierre Cheval-Gatinois produce fantastic Champagne from individual villages and vineyards. Grower Champagne, however, is more than mono-cru or single vineyard wines. These small growers are pushing the limits for quality, often pioneering organic and biodynamic Champagne. Sadly, grower Champagne is still not well understood by either the consumer or the wine trade.

Premium Sparkling Wines

Aside from Champagne, there are other regions with high quality producers of sparkling wines, which in our judgment are similar in quality and style to Champagne. We call these Premium Sparkling Wines. Premium sparkling wines have the following characteristics: i) they are sourced from vineyards that are cultivated exclusively for the production of sparkling wine; ii) the grapes used in these wines are essentially the same as those used in Champagne, mainly Chardonnay and Pinot Noir; and iii) the process of production in the vineyard and in the winery are for the most part, consistent with the méthode champenoise. Most premium sparkling wine producers also use malolactic fermentation (complete or partial) to give their wines a creamy mouth feel. Premium sparkling wines are produced in several countries, but most notably in California, in other American states such as Virginia, the Franciacorta region in Italy, and other parts of the world--South America, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and England.

California

Many of the noteworthy producers of Champagne-like sparkling wine are located in California. Beginning in the mid-1970s, many of the best Champagne houses in France (and the two major cava producers in Spain, Codorniu and Freixinet) established joint ventures or subsidiaries to produce sparkling wines
in California. Their estates are mainly located in Carneros, Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Along with Schramsberg, which began operations in the mid-1960s, Gloria Ferrer, Iron Horse Vineyards, and J Vineyards, are today producing some of the finest quality method champenoise sparkling wines in the world.

Some California sparkling wines such as Domaine Carneros’ Le Reve, Roederer Estate’s L’ Ermitage, Domaine Chandon’s Etoile, and Schramsberg’s J. Schram are comparable in quality and style to the best French champagnes and are more reasonably priced. They are sourced from top vineyard sites and blended with great expertise from as many as twenty to sixty separate still wines.

Other States

There are also fine producers of sparkling wine in Virginia, New Mexico, Michigan, New York State and Oregon. Two of Virginia’s notable producers are Kluge Estates and Thibaut & Jamisson. Both estates are turning out stunning wines that every bit as good as or better than many Champagnes. This is in large measure due to Claude Thibaut, the talented winemaker from Champagne who was instrumental in launching the Kluge sparklers and is now producing his own labels in Champagne and Virginia. The Gruet sparkling wines produced in New Mexico and Larry Mawby’s sparkling wines from Michigan are also of very good quality.

Franciacorta

Franciacorta is Italy’s premium sparkling wine produced using the metodo classico. It is made from Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco, and up to 15% Pinot Nero grapes. Franciacorta vineyards are situated northeast of Milan and enjoy the status of a DOCG classic brut appellation. The producers of Franciacorta have adopted a high code of self-regulation to maintain the high quality standards of their wines. The best examples of Franciacorta sparklers are produced by Bellavista, Cà Bosca and Uberti.

Other Parts of the World

Several other parts of the world also produce premium sparkling wines made from traditional Champagne varietals and using the metodo classico, beginning with other regions of Italy. These include wines produced by Cavit and Ferrari from the Trentino region, Costaripa from the Lombardy region, Vigne Regali and Bruno Giacosa from the Piedmont, and Tasca D’Almerita from Sicily.

In South America, Argentina produces a substantial amount of high quality sparkling wine, although not much is exported. Among the best exported Argentine sparklers are those made by Alma Negra and Luigi Bosca. From South Africa come the world class sparkling wines of Graham Beck. From Down Under come sparklers from Quartz Reef in New Zealand and R Wines in Australia. And from the newly emerging sparkling wine region of Sussex in England come vintage, traditional method sparkling wines from Nyetimber and Ridgeview.

Crémants and French Varietal Sparkling Wines

Outside of Champagne, there are some 38 other types of sparkling wines produced throughout France. Most of these wines are made following the méthode champenoise to some degree. The wines of the crémant appellations are especially noteworthy. (A crémant previously referred to a style of wine produced in Champagne, but in 1994 the crémant name was given to sparkling wine producers outside the Champagne region in exchange for them ceasing use of the term méthode champenoise) Among the notable crémants are those from the Alsace (Crémant d’Alsace) and the Burgundy (Crémant de Bourgogne). The Crémants of Jean Baptiste Adam, Lucien Albrecht, Bailly Lapierre, and L. Vitteaut-Alberti showed well in our review. There are also Crémants from the Loire Valley (Crémant de Loire), although none are reviewed here. The Loire Valley sparklers reviewed here are mainly bruts of modest quality made from Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Franc.

Interesting sparkling wines such as Clairette de Crémant de Die, Gailac Mousseaux, and Blanquette de Limoux (France’s first sparkling wine, according to some authorities), are also being produced in the south of France from indigenous local grape varieties. These wines are nicely textured with good fruit flavors and show plenty of yeasty richness.
from the process of malolactic and secondary fermentation. Antech is one of the better producers in Limoux.

**Indigenous Grape Sparklers**

Just as several regions of France make sparkling wines from indigenous grape varieties, so, too, do other regions of Europe. Spanish Cava, Italian Prosecco and Asti, Austrian and German Sekt, and some Greek sparklers are made from regional indigenous grape varieties. Some of these wines are made using processes similar to the *méthode champenoise*, but few of them reach the level of quality of non-vintage Champagne.

**Spanish Cava**

Cava is the sparkling wine of Spain. It is mainly produced from three indigenous white grape varieties—Macabéo, (the Viura of Rioja) Xarel-lo and Parellada. However, Chardonnay, Subirats (Malvasia from Rioja) and Pinot Noir are now also permitted in the blend. Cava rosé is produced from Garnacha (Grenache) and Monastrell and, in some instances, also from Pinot Noir and Trepat. The delimited area of Cava production (Denominación Cava) covers some 160 municipalities in 11 provinces across Spain, but 98% of all Cava is produced in Catalonia. Cava is produced following the *méthode champenoise* and is second only to Champagne in world sales of sparkling wine. This success, notwithstanding, most Cava does not reach the same quality levels as Champagne or other Premium Sparkling Wines. Some of the better Cava producers included in our tasting are Cristalino, Gramona, Gran Caus, Reventos i Blanc, Juvé y Camps, Montsara, Mont Marcal, Augustí Torelló and Poema.

**Prosecco**

Prosecco is Italy’s second most popular sparkling wine after Asti. It is produced from the Prosecco grape, which is native to the Veneto region, and is sometimes blended with Pinot Grigio and Pinot Bianco. Mainly produced in the DOC of Conegliano-Valdobbiandene, located just north of Venice, there are also small Prosecco production zones in other regions of Italy. The Prosecco grape variety is neutral in flavor, partly due to its high yields in the vineyard and are produced using the Charmat method. Some wines are vinified dry, while others are sweetened with sugar. The best examples of Prosecco are those produced by Bisol, Canella and Zardetto.

**Asti and other Italian Varietal Sparkling Wines**

Asti is one of Italy’s most important sparkling wines. It is produced from the Moscato Bianco (Muscat) grape, which is cultivated in 52 communes in the Piedmont provinces of Asti, Cuneo and Alessandria. Asti is made in a fresh sweet style by the Charmat or cuve close method. It used to be known as Asti Spumante but spumante was dropped in 1993 when Asti became a DOCG because of its association with the cheap fizz exported and sold under that name. Today, the best Asti wines are a far cry from their predecessors. They have a fine mousse and freshness, display rich aromas of orange, peach and apricot, are pleasantly sweet, and are refreshingly light and low in alcohol (7 to 9%). Some of the best examples are produced by Cinzano. Moscato D’Asti is the less effervescent cousin of Asti and is not really a spumante but a frizzante or fizzy wine. It is delicate, sweet and fruity and low in alcohol. Served fresh and chilled, it is a wonderful wine to drink with prosciutto and melon and with desserts of all kinds. Marenco and Villa Guida are very good producers of Moscato Di Asti. Brachetto d’Aqui is a red spumante from the Piedmont made from the Brachetto d’Aqui grape. It is relatively low in alcohol, often crimson in color, and offers cherry, raspberry, and cranberry-like flavors and aromas of rose petals. It was promoted to DOCG status in 1996. The best examples are from Cinzano and Vigne Regali.

**Austrian and German Sekt**

Sparkling wine produced in Austria and Germany is called Sekt. The vast majority of Sekt in both countries is produced by large estates using the Charmat method. Most Sekt is of relatively modest quality, demi-sweet and sweet in style, and moderately priced. More than three-quarters of the base wine used in German Sekt is imported from other EU countries, mainly Italy, France and Spain. Higher quality Sekt in brut and extra brut styles is
mainly produced by small estates using the *méthode traditionnelle*. Very little German Sekt is currently exported to the United States. The three producers-Schumann Nagler, Schloss Gobelsburg and Reischgraf von Kesselstatt—reviewed here all make good quality Sekt. Austrian Sekt, mainly from the Burgenland and Kamptal areas and made from Gruener Veltliner, Riesling and even Zwiegelt and Burgunder, is more widely available than German Sekt. The Austrian Sekts of Szigeti and Steininger are of very good quality.

**Greek Indigenous**

While Greece is increasingly recognized for its hearty red and refreshing white still wines made from indigenous Greek varietals, it is not yet well known for its sparkling wines. One of the more interesting findings in our extensive tasting of sparkling wines from around the world was the discovery of Greek sparkling wine made from the Moschafiler grape. We were able to find only one importer of this wine to the US, but the example we had—from Domaine Tselepos—was delicious.

**Sparkling Reds**

Sparkling Reds is another unique type of sparkling wine. While sparkling red is almost synonymous with Australian Sparkling Shiraz, other countries also produce it. New Zealand has a small production of sparkling Shiraz, while South Africa makes small amounts of sparkling Pinotage. Italy produces a sparkling red from the Brachetto d’Aqui grape, and Austria makes a sparkling red Sekt.

Sparkling Shiraz is both serious and fun, although it is perhaps appreciated more within Australia than outside. A full-bodied, dark purple-red fizzy wine, it offers a rich frothy mousse with lots of sweet black fruit flavor. The ones we tasted for this report were well made and enjoyable to drink. Some of the best examples are made by in Australia by *Primo* and *Majella*. If you ask an Aussie what to pair with Sparkling Shiraz he will tell you “bacon and eggs, of course, mate!” Americans might prefer to pair it with Thanksgiving turkey.

**Inexpensive Sparklers**

Inexpensive sparkling wines encompass a wide variety of sparklers produced around the world from Spanish Cava, Italian Asti, and German Sekt to Portugal and California. These low budget wines tend to be made from inexpensive grapes, are produced in large quantities by the Charmat and similar processes, and do not see secondary fermentation in the bottle. They are generally well-made in large modern high-tech wineries, which enable producers to offer them at rock bottom prices. Stylistically, these wines are typically fruity and sweet or semi-dry. They exhibit a rich mousse upon opening, are lightly aromatic, and are usually creamy and fruity on the palate. These inexpensive sparklers are widely available in retail wine shops. Some of the best inexpensive sparklers ($12 or less suggested retail price) we tasted include those made by *Codorniu, Conde de Subirats, Cristalino, Gran Sarao, Poema,* and *U Mes u Fan* in Spain; *Cinzano* in Italy; *Sao Domingos* in Portugal; and *Ballatore* and Gallo’s *Barefoot Bubbly* in California.
Our Selections of Top Sparkling Wines and Champagnes

The tastings we carried out for this report confirmed the abundance of excellent sparkling wines and Champagnes on the market. While the overall quality level is remarkably high, we have our favorites within each of the types of sparkling wine described above, and the list of our favorites is given below. Detailed notes on our selection of favorites and other top wines are found in the tasting notes and ratings. [NA = price not available.]

**Champagne**

Francois Billion 2002 Brut Millésime Le Mesnil -Sur-Oger ($56) 94
Bertrand Delespierre NV Brut Tradition, Premier Cru Chamery ($53) 93
Gosset 1998 Celebris Extra Brut ($178) 93
Louis Roederer 2003 Brut Rose Champagne Reims ($70) 93
Pol Roger NV Pure Brut Epernay ($57) 92
Aubry, L., Fils NV Brut Jouy-Les-Reims ($54) 92
Roland Champion 2000 Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Chouilly ($93) 92
Gatinois NV Cuvée Tradition Grand Cru Brut Ay ($48) 93
Henriot NV Blanc Souverain Pur Chardonnay Reims ($60) 92
Henriot 1998 Brut Millésimé Reims ($95) 92
Henriot 1995 Cuvée des Enchanteleurs Reims ($195) 92
Louis Roederer 2003 Brut Vintage Reims ($70) 92
Paul Clouet NV Rosé Brut Bouzy ($50) 92
Pol Roger 1999 Brut Vintage Epernay ($103) 92
Dehours NV Grand Reserve Brut Cerseuil ($38) 91
Trouillard NV Cuvée Elexium Rosé Epernay ($56) 91

**Premium Sparkling Wines**

**California**

Roederer Estate 2000 L’ Ermitage Brut Anderson Valley ($45) 94
Schramsberg 2000 J Schram ($90) 94
J Vineyards 1997 RR Vintage Brut Late Disgorged Russian River Valley ($115) 93
Schramsberg 2001 Reserve ($90) 93
J Vineyards and Winery Brut Rose Russian River Valley ($40) 92
Iron Horse Vineyards 1996 Blanc de Blancs LD Sonoma Coast-Green Valley ($80) 92
J Vineyards 1999 Vintage Brut Russian River Valley ($50) 91
Roederer Estate NV Brut Rose ($23) 91
Schramsberg 2005 Blanc de Blancs ($35) 91
Schramsberg 2004 Crémant Demi-Sec ($38) 91

**Other States**

Argyle 2006 Brut Rosé, Willamette Valley ($30) 92
Thibaut & Janisson Winery NV Blanc de Chardonnay Monticello Virginia ($30) 91
Kluge Estate Winery 2004 Blanc de Blancs Albemarle County Virginia ($27) 91
Argyle 2000 Blanc de Blancs, Julia Lee’s Block, Dundee Hills ($40) 91
Kluge Estate Winery 2004 SP Rosé Albemarle County ($32) 90
L Mawby NV Blanc de Noir Leelanau Peninsula Michigan ($18) 90
Gruet Méthode Champenoise, Demi-sec NV New Mexico ($14) 88
L Mawby NV Tailsman Leelanau Peninsula ($30) 88
Wolffer 2004 Brut Sparkling Wine Long Island ($35) 88

**Australia and New Zealand**

Jansz NV Brut Tasmania ($22) 92
Quartz Reef NV Central Otago ($30) 91
R Wines 2004 Punk Bubbles Blanc de Blancs Adelaide Hills ($NA) 89
**Franciacorta**
- Bellavista 2002 Franciacorta Pas Opere Lombardy ($85) 94
- Cà del Bosco 2003 Franciacorta Satèn Lombardy ($45) 92
- Uberti NV Magnificientia Satèn Franciacorta (EUR 34€) 93
- Bellavista NV Franciacorta Gran Cuvée Satèn Lombardy ($82) 92

**Argentina**
- Alma Negra 2006 Sparkling Chardonnay Mendoza ($20) 90
- Luigi Bosca NV Bohème Brut Nature Mendoza ($50) 89

**South Africa**
- Graham Beck 2006 Brut Rosé Western Cape ($19) 89
- Graham Beck NV Sparkling Pinotage Robertson ($NA) 89
- Graham Beck NV Brut Western Cape ($15) 88

**Crémant and Other French**
- L. Vitteaut-Alberti NV Crémant de Bourgogne Brut ($25) 89
- Jean-Baptiste Adam NV Crémant de Alsace Brut Alsace ($10) 88
- Bailly Lapierre 2005 Brut Crémant de Bourgogne ($20) 88
- Domaine d’Orfeuilles NV Vouvray Brut Loire Valley ($18) 88
- Antech Blanquette de Limoux ($15) 88

**Cavas, Prosecco, and Other Indigenous Sparklers**

**Cava**
- Can Rafols dels Caus Gran Caus Gran Reserva 2003 (EUR 13€) 93
- Can Rafols dels Caus Gran Caus Rosado Extra Brut 2004 (EUR 17€) 92
- Montsarra NV Brut Cava ($23) 91
- Poema NV Brut Cava ($12) 91
- Raventos i Blanc 2003 Gran Reserva de la Finca Cava ($40) 91
- Agusti Torello Mata 2003 Kripta Brut Nature Gran Reserva Cava ($75) 90
- Celler Batlle Gramona Imperial Gran Reserva 2004 (EUR 18€) 90
- Celler Batlle Gramona III Lustros Gran Reserva 2001 (EUR 23€) 90
- Cristalino 2003 Brut Finca El Padruell Cava ($NA) 90
- Maria Casanovas 2004 Brut Nature Gran Reserva Cava ($40) 90
- Mont Marcal 2005 Brut Reserva Cava ($14) 90
- Mont Marcal NV Brut Extremarium Cava ($21) 90

**Prosecco**
- Zardetto 2007 Zeta Prosecco di Conegliano ($22) 90
- Bisol NV Jeio Cuvée Rose Brut Veneto ($18) 88
- Bisol 2007 Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Brut Crede Veneto ($26) 88
- Canella NV Prosecco di Conegliano Veneto ($19) 88
- Canella NV Vino Spumante Brut Veneto ($20) 88
- Zardetto NV Brut Prosecco Prosecco di Conegliano ($15) 88

**Other Premium Italian Bruts**
- Cavit NV Altemasi Riserva Graal Trento ($36) 90
- Costaripa NV Brut Metodo Classico Lombardy ($41) 90
- Ferrari NV Perle Trento ($33) 90
- Tasca D’Almerita 2004 Brut Contea di Sciafani DOC Sicily ($55) 90
- Vigne Regali NV Banfi Brut Piedmont ($24) 90
- Bruno Giacosa 2004 Spumante Extra Brut Piedmont ($60) 89
- Ferrari NV Brut Trento ($25) 89

**Austrian and German Sekt**
- Szigeti NV Brut Cuvee Prestige NV Burgenland Austria ($36) 89
- Schloss Gobelsburg NV Brut Reserve Germany ($42) 89
Factors That Contribute to Quality Sparkling Wine*

Sparkling wine is produced around the world by a wide variety of techniques and methods. However, sparkling wines of the highest quality produced in Champagne and elsewhere, are the product of careful vineyard management and winemaking practices which closely follow the méthode champenoise. While the vast majority of sparkling wine producers do not rigorously follow all of these practices, we believe it is useful for our readers to be aware of the key factors which contribute to the quality of sparkling wine. These quality factors are as follows:

The Vineyard. Quality sparkling wine starts in the vineyard as it does for all wine. High quality sparklers are almost always sourced from well managed vineyards designated exclusively for sparkling wine. Provided grapes achieve the necessary sugar levels at harvest, high yields do not detract from the quality of sparkling wine. And it is a misconception that it is appropriate to do early harvests of sparkling wine grapes. Physiological ripeness of grapes is what counts and slow maturing of fruit in cool climate vineyards also contributes to the quality of the grapes.

Grape varieties. There are well over 150 white and red grape varieties around the world that are used to produce sparkling wine. However, only a small percentage of these grapes produce outstanding sparklers. The most successful sparkling wines are produced from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, the classic Champagne grape varieties. As noted earlier, there are many other grape varieties, some of them indigenous, that produce high quality sparklers.

Harvesting. Hand harvesting of grapes is essential for high quality sparkling wine. Although machine harvesting is used for lesser quality sparkling wines and inexpensive sparklers. Hand harvesting is essential for high quality sparkling wines.

Wine making. There are many important steps to making quality sparkling wine from pressing to age ageing. A detailed description of the méthode
champenoise and other methods for producing sparkling wine are provided in Annex I and Annex II. Here we will only touch on a few of the most salient factors in the method champenoise contributing to quality.

Pressing. The grapes for quality sparkling wine must be pressed in whole bunches only and pressing must be done as quickly and as softly as possible to avoid coloration of the juice. The best mechanism for pressing—especially for pressing of black grapes—is the traditional coquard press, which is used in Champagne, and the modern pneumatic press. The coquard press is rarely used outside of Champagne, although J Vineyards in California has been using the coquard press to make sparkling wine for several years.

Base Wine. The base wine for sparkling wine needs to be relatively simple or neutral in terms of color, aroma and flavor with ideal alcohol levels at 10.5-11% and adequate acidity. Minimum handling of the base wine contributes to mousse retention. The complexity of the wine comes later with the second fermentation and bottle ageing.

Fermentation. A fast and furious first fermentation of the base wine at the appropriate temperature (65-68° F) is vital to avoid unwanted aromas (banana, bubble gum) which can result from fermentation at too low a temperature. Moderate malolactic fermentation, if needed, often follows the first fermentation to contribute finesse to the wine. The second fermentation is carried out slowly in the bottle at no more than 53° for a brut-style wine.

Lees ageing. Maintaining sparkling wine on its lees is what gives it complexity. For the very top Champagnes the goal is to generate autolysis, which should last from between 18 to 24 months up to a maximum of four to five years. While there are legal minimum limits to lees aging in Champagne, there is no fixed ageing period.

Dosage. The primary role of the dosage is to counter the acidity in sparkling wine by adding sugar. The younger the wine, the more aggressive the acidity and thus more sugar is required in the dosage to attain balance.

Post-disgorgement ageing. Most Champagne and top sparkling wine is shipped three to six months after disgorgement. Late disgorged, vintage Champagne is best consumed relatively soon after disgorgement. Younger, non-vintage Champagne and sparkling wine can benefit from moderate bottle ageing after disgorgement to ensure the dosage is fully integrated into the wine.

* We are indebted to Tom Stevenson for many of the observations in this section.

Sparkling Wine Production Methods

There are several methods employed by winemakers for producing sparkling wine. The oldest and best known of these methods is the méthode champenoise which is used to produce Champagne and other high quality sparkling wines around the world. There are several other methods used for producing sparkling wines of lesser quality, the principal ones being the transfer method, the Charmat process, and carbonation. Each of these methods are briefly described below.

Méthode Champenoise

The classic method of producing sparkling wines has been perfected over centuries in the Champagne region. It involves the blending of still base wines with a measured amount of sugar and yeast, thereby inducing a second fermentation in the bottle. The sparkle in Champagne is created by the production of carbon-dioxide gas which is trapped in the bottle and dissolved in the wine. Riddling, or rotation of the bottles, is an essential part of this process. The process also produces sediments which need to be disgorged. A detailed step by step description of the méthode champenoise is provided in Annex I

Transfer Method

Sparkling wine made by the transfer method, follows the same procedure as the méthode champenoise. The main difference is that the transfer method dispenses with the riddling and disgorgement steps of the méthode champenoise. After secondary fermentation and a period of lees contact, the bottles are chilled and their contents are transferred to a bulk pressure tank where the sediment is removed by filtration. A dosage is then added, and the wine is bottled, corked and wired. The transfer method is considerably less expensive and time-consuming than the méthode champenoise. The transfer method can go from harvest to bottling in as little as ninety days. Proponents of this process claim the transfer method produces a more consistent product.
from bottle to bottle, while detractors say the process strips flavor elements, especially yeast flavors, from the wine. Nonetheless, many Champagne makers use the transfer method to produce any size bottle smaller than 750 ml. or larger than 1.5 liter. Most Australian premium sparkling wines are made by the transfer method.

**Charmat Process**
The Charmat process, or tank method, which is also referred to in French as cuve close (sealed tank), is commonly used to produce inexpensive sparkling wines. It is much cheaper, faster and less labor intensive than either the traditional méthode champenoise or the transfer method. In the Charmat or tank method secondary fermentation is induced in a pressure-resistant steel tank rather than in a bottle by adding sugar and yeast to the base wine. The secondary fermentation – “prise de mousse” – usually lasts for only 10 days. Once fermentation is complete the sparkling wine is chilled in order to stabilize it and reduce its effervescence. The result is then filtered, a dosage is added, and the resulting sparkling wine is bottled. This process takes as little as ninety days from harvest to bottling. The wines made by this method include Italian Prosecco, Asti, Sekt, and inexpensive California sparklers.

**Carbonation**
This method, which is rather similar to the production of soft drinks, involves pumping exogenous carbon dioxide gas into a tank of wine that has been stabilized and chilled. There is no secondary fermentation “prise de mousse” in this method. The gas is added proportionally in fine streams to the wine (brut, demi-sec, sweet) in a vessel known as a saturator. The gas dissolves instantly and extensively in the wine. Excess gas in the wine is compressed upon bottling, and effervescence appears when the bottle is opened. This is the cheapest of all the methods for producing sparkling wine and is the least durable. These wines usually have large bubbles when first opened, but their mousse fades quickly. Nonetheless if the base wine is good, the sparkling wine can be very good also. The Australian sparkling Shiraz made by Paringa is made by carbonation and is quite delicious.

**Summary**
The results of these different processes are generally noticeable in the wines. The transfer method and Charmat wines usually have larger and relatively short-lived; bubbles. Méthode champenoise bubbles are generally finer, better integrated into the wine, and longer lasting. The fine bubbles resulting from méthode champenoise contribute to a creamy mouth feel, and the autolysis of this method creates a complexity not found in sparkling wines made by other methods. That being said, there are high quality sparklers being made by the transfer, Charmat and even carbonation methods.

**Tasting Sparkling Wine**
Learning how to taste sparkling wine isn’t all that difficult, although tasting sparkling wine does present some challenges different from still wine. In buying and tasting sparklers, one should keep in mind the following: i) Most sparkling wines, with the exception perhaps of low budget rosés, are not very fruity or highly aromatic; ii) Sparkling wines have many subtle flavors that are not often found in still wine and which may be difficult to recognize at first, and iii) Sparkling wines aren’t often served with “real food” so they are in your face, so to speak, bubbles and all, and chances are you will either like them or not, without the modifying influence of food. In our tastings of hundreds of wines for this issue, we focused on five main attributes of sparklers. These attributes are much the same as one would look for in most wines, but there are notable differences as well, such as effervescence, fruitiness and autolytic characteristics.

**Appearance** - How does the wine look? Is it clear and bright? Is its color light straw, or does it tend towards lemon yellow or even amber? Is it frothy when poured from the bottle? How is the effervescence? Are the bubbles big or small, lively or rather dull?

*Hint:* Color may reveal the ripeness of the fruit or the aging of the wine. However, the overall appearance is likely to have more impact at the emotional level. Bubble, after all are the point of sparkling wine.

**Aroma** - What does the sparkling wine smell like - flowers, fruit, yeast, brioche, toast, nuts, or some combination? Is the aroma big or subdued?

*Hint:* Aromas can be a good predictor of flavor. The complexity and nature of the bouquet often correlates with overall quality. Most Champagnes have refined, delicate autolytic and yeasty characteristics that integrate with the wine as a whole, while other sparkling wines have bolder, less subtle and perhaps even disjointed aromas.
**Mouth feel and Flavor** - How does the wine feel in the mouth? Is it spritzy or creamy? Does it taste fresh, or old. Which are the principal flavors—are they fruity or more autolytic in nature? Are the flavors similar to the aromas? Is the wine dry, semi-dry, or sweet? (Annex II presents the official terms widely used to categorize sparkling wines according to levels of sweetness.)

*Hint:* Mouth feel is especially important in evaluating sparkling wines. Freshness, acidity, and creaminess are among the key elements in good Champagne and sparkling wines. Fruitiness is not a virtue per se. Most of the better Champagnes have rather subtle fruit flavors, while some inexpensive sparklers are made very fruity because many people like that style. Most New World sparkling wines show some fruitiness, as do rosé Champagnes.

**Balance and Complexity** - Is the wine well integrated, and are the various components in balance? Does the wine have the correct amount of acidity? Does the wine appear to be simple, or complex? Is it distinctive?

*Hint:* Most Champagnes and the better sparkling wines are put through malolactic fermentation to soften hard acids and round out the wine. Inexpensive sparkling wines can be astringent and have unbalanced sugar and acid components. Sometimes a méthode champenoise producer will leave the wine en tirage for an extended period of years and then bottle a "Reserve" or "Late Disgorged" sparkling wine. These wines are mostly vintage dated, usually a decade or more old when released for sale, and also immediately ready to consume.

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**Sparkling Wines and Food Pairing**

By Edward M Korry MA CWE

All too often consumers regard sparkling wines as merely for special occasions, rather than a wine to be enjoyed with food. After all, what is a more fitting end to a romantic evening than sparkling wine? And what beverage better accompanies a toast to newlyweds?

What is often overlooked is that sparkling wines are among the most versatile of wines from a gustatory perspective. On those rare occasions that wine is consumed for breakfast, it is almost always a sparkling wine. And, as the reader will detect in the table below, a dry, high acid, medium to full bodied sparkling wine is one of the few wines to both accompany egg dishes extremely well and be enhanced by brioche or buttery croissants.

Unfortunately, all too often sparkling wines are ruined by food. For example, most sparkling wines, especially some of the most prestigious and expensive dry Champagnes, do not pair well with the classic matches of caviar or strawberries. In these cases, the umami of caviar or the sweetness of strawberries radically alters the taste and balance of the wine. Why? The umami (aged protein taste) or sweetness heighten the perception of acidity and diminish, if not eliminate altogether, the perception of flavor. Yet, many consumers unknowingly spend inordinate sums for just such a food and wine experience. And let's not forget the ubiquitous sparkling wine with wedding cake which is ruinous to the wine unless it is one the many sweet sparklers that are sweeter than the cake.

Quite often prestigious wines also suffer by being paired with foods that are either too intensely flavored or have inappropriate levels of sweetness. The multi-layered subtleties of prestige cuvées need delicate and balanced foods. There are foods that can enhance those subtleties as noted below. At the end of the day, it is always the preference of the consumer that is paramount, but keeping an eye on basic guidelines for food and wine pairing will enhance the gustatory experience. It is especially important to avoiding pairing very high umami foods and bitter vegetables with sparkling wines.

The difficulty in putting a useful table together as a food pairing guideline is that the sparkling wine category has such breadth and depth. Yet, it is also that breadth and depth of sparkling wine that provides commensurately wide possibilities for food pairing. So rather than categorize by region, which is a time honored tradition, the following table focuses on the dryness, acidity level and intensity of the wines to make food pairing suggestions. In addition to this table, readers will find further suggestions on pairing Champagne and food in the *International Wine Review* Report #9 Champagne.
## Sparkling Wine and Food Pairing Guideline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style of Sparkling Wine</th>
<th>Hors d’oeuvres</th>
<th>Egg and vegetable dishes</th>
<th>Fish and Seafood</th>
<th>Chicken, Veal and Pork</th>
<th>Beef and game based</th>
<th>Cheeses and Pastries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra Brut, light bodied, light intensity: Brut Sauvage, Brut Natural, Prosecco; Cava</td>
<td>Oysters on the half shell (no sauce) raw bar ceviche; sashimi</td>
<td>Fried artichokes, soft boiled eggs with truffles</td>
<td>Fried white fish, sushi, smoked salmon, seafood salad</td>
<td>Vol-au-vent or beggar’s purses with chicken, veal scaloppini</td>
<td>Mozzarella di Buffala</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brut, medium-bodied, medium intensity Blanc de Blancs, Crémants</td>
<td>Cream soups; deep fried shrimp, clams oreganata, bruschetta caprese; sashimi</td>
<td>Frito misto; omelettes aux fines herbes; hummus; baba ganoush</td>
<td>Poached salmon; broiled sole; lobster in butter</td>
<td>Cold or poached chicken with leeks</td>
<td>Soft cheeses such as brie, not pungent; chèvre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra dry, medium-bodied, medium high acid, medium intensity, fruit forward (US, Australian, NZ)</td>
<td>Caldo verde; seafood terrines</td>
<td>Vegetable empanadas; frittatas,</td>
<td>Fish cakes, grilled salmon/ halibut</td>
<td>Southern fried chicken, fried pork, roast chicken or veal ragout</td>
<td>Middle Eastern cuisine; kufta and kabobs</td>
<td>Manchego, montenебro, ronal cheeses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry, aged and complex (vintage Champagne)</td>
<td>Sushi (but no tuna)</td>
<td>Mushroom dishes</td>
<td>Fish quenelles;</td>
<td>Veal breast with cream sauce; pork arista; sweetbreads</td>
<td>Duck maigret with morels;</td>
<td>Vintage gouda,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry, high acid, medium-bodied Rosés and Blanc de Noirs</td>
<td>Foie gras; carpaccio of beef</td>
<td>Ratatouille</td>
<td>Grilled salmon, grilled shrimp</td>
<td>Beef tenderloin with mushrooms</td>
<td>Pork asado; Thanksgiving turkey; roast duck</td>
<td>Aged dry cheeses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry, full bodied Rosés and Red Sparkling</td>
<td>Charcuterie/ pâtés</td>
<td>Grilled tuna steaks</td>
<td>Turkey, pork w/ mole sauce; beef stews</td>
<td>Rack of lamb; rare venison tenderloin</td>
<td>Aged Cheddars; Emmenthal; Gruyere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-dry wines (extra dry to sec)</td>
<td>Salty salami Thai</td>
<td>Spicy, coconut milk shrimp</td>
<td>Spicy chicken curries; ham dishes</td>
<td>Quail with pomegranate sauce or dried cherries</td>
<td>Panetone; Genoese cakes; fraise aux bois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet sparkling wines (Demi-sec +) Asti, Brachetto D’Asti</td>
<td>Prosciutto with melon</td>
<td>Spicy curried fish dishes</td>
<td>Ham with dried or sweet fruit; pork with mango chutney</td>
<td>Sweet cakes and tarts; strawberries dipped in chocolate; blue cheeses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tasting Notes and Ratings

The International Wine Review team tasted more than 250 sparkling wines for this report. The wines were tasted blind by our tasting panel under controlled conditions. Sessions were devoted to vintage and non-vintage Champagne, Cava, Prosecco, Franciacorta, and other sparkling wines similar in type and origin. Whenever possible, we tried to obtain the latest vintages and the most recent releases of non-vintage wines, although we were not always able to do so.

The i-WineReview rates wines using the 100 point system. We do not write-up wines which receive a rating of below 85 points. The ratings are as follows:

- **95-100** A wine of distinction
- **90-94** A wine of outstanding or superior quality
- **85-89** A wine of good to excellent quality
- **84 and below** Not recommended

Almost all of the wines reviewed here are sold in the US or will soon appear in retail wine shops. When wines are not available in the US, that fact is noted. Some wines are unfortunately, in very short supply and readers will have difficulty finding them. The i-WineReview is more than happy to advise readers where they might obtain specific wines reviewed in the report. Obviously, the web is a great place to start a search if local wine shops don’t carry the sought after wine. We also encourage readers to check with our Recommended Retailers throughout the country listed on www.i-winereview.com.

Readers will also find these reviews in our Tasting Notes and Ratings Archive on www.i-winereview.com.

France

Champagnes

**Francois Billion 2002 Brut Millésime Le Mesnil-Sur-Oger ($56) 94**
Yellow gold color showing nutty, oxidative aromas and jasmine notes. Extremely rich with a lovely acidic balance and a kaleidoscope of toasted grain and hazelnut flavors. Finishes very, very long. This is an absolutely gorgeous wine! Importer: William Harrison Imports Manassas, VA

**Francois Billion NV Cuvée Marie-Catherine Le Mesnil-Sur-Oger ($47) 91**
Yellow gold color, showing aromas of rich melon and pear and fresh baguette.
Elegant, flavorful, and with a very creamy, balanced palate. Importer: William Harrison Imports Manassas, VA

**Francois Billion Grand Cru Cuvée de Reserve Le Mesnil -Sur-Oger ($48) 92**
Light yellow gold with an aromatic profile of flowers, bread dough, and ripe, Chardonnay fruit. Rich, full-flavored attack and a beautifully balanced, elegant palate. Lovely, long, crisp somewhat tart finish. A beautifully crafted Champagne! Importer: William Harrison Imports Manassas, VA

**Francois Billion Brut Spécial Rosé NV Le Mesnil -Sur-Oger ($48) 87**
A beautiful, festive wine, deep salmon in color with a fine active bead. Autolytic nose of rich, dried cherry fruit. Rich, very flavorful, creamy palate that is both beautifully balanced and elegant. This is a Champagne that calls for food. Importer: William Harrison Imports Manassas, VA

**Paul Clouet NV Rosé Brut Bouzy ($50) 92**
Beautiful, festive looking, deep salmon colored wine with a nice, active bead. Nose of oxidized aromas and rich, dried cherry fruit. Rich, very flavorful, creamy palate that is beautifully balanced and elegant. A great food wine! Importer: Exclusive Wine Imports, Richmond, VA
Delamotte NV Brut Le Mesnil -Sur-Oger ($55) 87
Medium lemon with a big mousse and somewhat restrained aromas. Zesty attack followed by light flavors of pear and apple and a slightly astringent mid-palate and finish. This is a Champagne that will show best with food. Importer: Wilson Daniels Ltd. St. Helena, CA

Delbeck NV Brut Hermitage Reims ($67) 90
Yellow gold with a very fine bead and aromas of roasted nuts and lees. Creamy and very nicely balanced palate with flavors of hazelnut and shortbread. Finish is long and creamy. Importer: Broadbent Selections Inc, San Francisco, CA

Bertrand Delespierre NV Brut Tradition, Premier Cru Chamery ($53) 93

Deutz NV Brut Classic Ay-champagne ($35) 91
Straw gold with a very fine bead. Subtle nose with floral notes of frangipani and biscuit. Beautifully balanced on an elegant palate with very light cherry and yeast notes. Its texture is seamless and integrated. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Gosset NV Brut Excellence ($45) 91
Light lemon color with a lovely, full mousse. Ripe, yeasty, fresh and elegant on the nose with rich and creamy pear and peach flavors on the palate, married to perfect acidity and balance. A terrific Champagne for a meal. Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Gosset 1998 Celebris Extra Brut ($178) 93
This is a creamy, elegant Champagne, gold in color, with a refined nose of toasted hazelnut and freshly baked baguette. This wine’s very dry attack surprises with a creamy, elegant mouth feel. Nuanced flavors of yeast, roasted nuts, and rich tropical fruit. Long, lingering dry finish of freshly baked croissants. A great food wine. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Henriot NV Blanc Souverain Pur Chardonnay Reims ($60) 92
Lemon gold, showing an auto-lytic and intensely aromatic nose of yeast and roasted hazelnuts. The rich, refined palate of dried pear and peach, nuts, and fresh bread is layered and deep. The finish is long and creamy. Importer: Henriot NY, NY

Henriot 1998 Brut Millésimé Reims ($95) 92
Medium gold with a delicate nose that’s somewhat floral with light citrus and nutty notes. The palate shows very clean, pure and fresh flavors of creamy lemon mousse. Rich, mouth-filling and delicious! Importer: Henriot NY, NY

Henriot NV Brut Rosé Reims ($70) 89
Medium dark salmon color with fine, active beads. Fresh, light cherry aromas give way to a creamy and mousse like attack. The soft, elegant mouthfeel is well integrated, showing light raspberry flavors. Importer: Henriot NY, NY

Henriot NV Brut Souverain Reims ($50) 91
Medium light lemon blend of 40% Chardonnay, 60% Pinot Noir showing aromas of fresh lemon tart with yeasty notes. There’s a rich, creamy attack of delicate citrus and toasted brioche flavors and a long finish of creamy lemon mousse. . Importer: Henriot NY, NY

Henriot 1995 Cuvée des Enchanteleurs Reims ($195) 92
Medium gold with a lovely, complex nose of almond paste, yeast, and toasted bread. On the palate, there’s moderate coconut fruit nicely integrated with autolytic flavors. Crisp in character but finishes with a creamy mousse. Importer: Henriot NY, NY

Legras & Haas NV Cuvée Prestige Brut Chouilly ($90)
Lemon gold blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir showing a beautiful complex nose of bread dough and citrus fruit. There’s a creamy and elegant palate of hazelnuts and white peaches with hints of cherry fruit and a rich, lingering finish. . Importer: Exclusive Wine Imports, Richmond, VA
Pannier NV Selection NV Brut Chateau Thierry ($35) 88
Medium lemon color with tight beads and aromas of green apples and lees. Mouthfilling flavors of pear and apple with moderate complexity and leesy accents. Importer: International Cellars Vienna, VA

Pannier Selection NV Brut Rosé Chateau Thierry ($35) 88
Salmon color with a rich mousse and aromas of raspberry and yeast. Soft and rich on the palate with spicy red cherry fruit and autolytic notes. Excellent balance and moderate length on the dry finish. Importer: International Cellars Vienna, VA

Louis Roederer NV Brut Premier Reims ($47) 91
Beautiful appearance with lively beads in a straw gold sea. This 2/3 Pinot Noir, 1/3 Chardonnay blend shows a nose of yeast and citrus and a creamy, soft round mouth feel. A fairly neutral palate of apple and pear gives way to a very dry, long and elegant finish. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Louis Roederer 2003 Brut Vintage Reims ($70) 92
Yellow gold with aromas of tangerine, biscuit and petrol. This elegant and bright Champagne has a wonderful, fleshy mouth feel and a beautifully balanced palate of minerals, light roasted nuts, and rich fruit. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Louis Roederer 2003 Rosé Reims ($70) 93
Medium salmon blend of 70% Pinot Noir and 30% Chardonnay with a very fine bead. Elegant aromas of yeast and light cherry and a palate of bright cherry fruit and brioche. Overall, sleek and silky with a long, very flavorful and dry finish. A great food wine. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Pol Roger NV Rich Non-Vintage Epernay ($57) 90
Yellow gold with a fine bead and a toasty brioche nose with rich aromas of dried apricot, pear and melon notes. A rich, sweet mouthfilling mousse is sustained to the finish. There’s a butterscotch note on the palate with an almost sweet aftertaste. Importer: Frederick Wildman and Sons New York, NY

Pol Roger 1999 Brut Vintage Epernay ($103) 92
A lemon gold blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay with refined aromas of yeast and citrus. Delicate in texture with bright, lemon tart flavors that dance on the palate. Amazingly light, elegant and racy for a vintage champagne. Importer: Frederick Wildman and Sons New York, NY

Roland Champion 2000 Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Chouilly ($93) 94
Bright deep gold with a very creamy mousse and an autolytic nose of rich yeast, dried apricots, and a touch of crème caramel. The elegant and silky but intense palate shows flavors of toasted nuts. Can hold up to strongly-flavored food. Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils, Ltd. Winchester, VA

Roland Champion NV Brut Blanc de Blanc Chouilly ($61) 91
Medium gold color with very attractive aromas of yeast and lemon tart. A lovely and very flavorful palate of yeast and nuts gives way to a long, long finish. This is a crowd pleaser! Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils, Ltd. Winchester, VA

Saint-Meyland NV Brut France ($12) 89
A delicious sparkling, light rose petal colored blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gamay and Aligote. Pleasantly aromatic with red apple scents and nice fresh, tart flavors on an elegant palate. Well balanced with excellent acidity and a crisp, fruity finish. Well made and a real bargain. Importer: William Harrison Imports Manassas, VA

Saint-Meyland NV Rosé Brut France ($12) 88
Dark rose, full-flavored bubbly with floral aromas and cherry notes. Fruit rich, creamy attack with assertive cherry flavors and a hint of almond. Finishes long and flavorful. Serve with chocolate wedding cake. Importer: William Harrison Imports Manassas, VA
Trouillard NV Brut Extra Selection Epernay ($50) 92
Medium gold color with a rich, seductive nose of roasted grains. Shows an elegant attack and a very fine, rich mousse. Finishes very dry but long. Dried lemon peel and toasted bread are evident on the richly textured palate with notable mineral character. Finishes very dry and long.  Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils, Ltd Winchester, VA

Trouillard NV Cuvée Elexium Rosé Epernay ($56) 89
A salmon-colored Champagne with a nice fine, active bead. Yeasty nose with dried cherry and toasted oak notes. A creamy attack leads to a lightly flavored palate of fresh cherry and a crisp, dry finish. Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils, Ltd Winchester, VA

Grower Champagnes

Agrapart & Fils NV Brut Rose 1er Cru NV Avise ($57) 91
This brut rose is a blend of 90% Chardonnay and 10% Pinot. It displays a lovely dark rose color with attractive aromas of dried red berry fruit and spice. It is beautifully balanced with rich mouth feel. A relatively low dosage prevents the wine from being cloying. Well done!  Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Agrapart & Fils NV Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Avise ($48) 91
This is a rich yeasty, complex Champagne with a yellow gold color and aromas and flavors of dried apricot, wet stone and minerals. It has a lovely bead, a lively palate and a terrific long finish. An impressive wine from this organic producer. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Agrapart & Fils NV Les 7 Crus Avise ($45) 90
Sourced from 7 villages of the Cote des Blanc, this champagne offers a full mousse with assertive flavors of ripe pear and anise. Round and broad on the palate, possibly from extended malo, with attractive mineral notes, excellent acidity and balance. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Michel Arnould NV Brut Grand Cru Versenay ($45) 90
A yellow-gold, 100% Pinot Noir Champagne that shows elegant aromas of yeast and lees. It’s round and moderately fruity with aromas of apple and pear on a dry and balanced palate.  Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Michel Arnould NV Rosé Grand Crut Brut Versenay ($48) 89
Deep salmon color, this soft and silky Rose shows pleasant cherry and dried red berry aromas and flavors. The palate offers more dried fruit with yeast notes. This is a wine that evolves, and improves, in the glass. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

H. Billot Fils NV Brut Réserve NV Ambonnay ($68) 91
(Disgorged 1/08) Yellow gold. Rich mousse with lively small beads. Ripe pear, red apple and yeasty aromas on the nose. Soft rich attack, creamy mouth filling sweet ripe pear fruit on the palate, and a lovely lingering and flavorful finish. A champagne of richness and understated complexity of 75% Grand Cru Pinot Noir and 25% Chardonnay  Importer: Terry Theise Estate Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Chartogne-Taillet NV Sainte Anne Brut Merfy-Depuis ($54) 90
Bright medium gold with an autolytic nose of toasted bread and yeast. Rich and creamy on the palate with flavors of roasted nuts, toasted brioche, and a touch of honey. Finishes with a creamy note. Importer: Terry Theise Estate Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

René-Henri Countier NV Brut Tradition, Premier Cru Ambonnay ($45) 89
A light lemon blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay. There’s a lovely mousse with citrus aromas on the nose. The mineral-infused palate is creamy with a certain elegance. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Dehours NV Grand Reserve Brut Cerceuil ($38) 91
Deours is an organic producer who is passionate about Pinot Meunier. His champagne is a blend of 48% Pinot Meunier, 36% Chardonnay and 16% Pinot Noir. Medium lemon in color, it is rich and creamy on the palate with an earthy mineral character and melon-like fruit flavors that carry forward to the finish. It also shows excellent acidity, persistence and balance. Very well done. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA
Gatinois NV Cuvée Tradition Grand Cru Brut Ay ($48) 93
Gatinois’ Brut is a blend of 90% Pinot Noir and 10% Chardonnay. It reveals a medium lemon color with a red tint. It is rich and creamy in the mouth with clean delicious flavors of pear and light dried cherry fruit with yeasty notes. Gatinois achieves great mouth feel without using any oak. This is a wine of power and delicacy made by a first-class winemaker from a top vineyard site. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Goutorbe NV Cuvée Prestige Brut Ay-champagne ($60) 89

Marc Hebrart NV Brut Mareuil-Sur-Ay ($56) 88
Medium gold color with a creamy mousse and prominent oak notes with a touch of nuts on the nose. The steely palate is slightly austere with flavors of nuts and minerals. Importer: Terry Theise Estate Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

A. Margaine NV Brut Premier Cru Villers-Marmery Marne ($56) 90
Medium straw color with a very fine bead and yeast aromas with pear and melon notes. Rich, full, clean and fresh palate of lees and water crackers and a crisp, dry finish. Importer: Terry Theise Estate Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Jean Milan NV Brut Oger ($62) 89
Lemon gold color with a big citrus mousse and yeast-like aromas. Round on the palate with flavors of stone fruit and fresh bread. Finishes long with nice fruit. Importer: Terry Theise Estate Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Pehu Simonet NV Brut Selection Grand Cru Verzenay ($60) 87
Rose tinged straw with assertive aromas of cherry and brioche. There’s a tart palate with bold flavors of cherry and marzipan. A flavorful champagne meant to be consumed with food. Importer: Terry Theise Estate Selections/Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Vorin-Jumel Blanc de Blanc 1er Cru NV Crémant ($45) 89
Displaying a light hay color, this Blanc de Blancs reveals a lovely bead and aromas of flowers, red apple and pear. It is clean and fresh with a round and creamy mouth feel and simple flavors. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

Vorin-Jumel Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru NV Crémant ($48) 90
Vorin-Jumel’s medium-lemon colored Blanc de Blancs displays floral and citrus aromas with attractive minerality on the palate. Spending 3-4 years in neutral barrels, it reveals attractive roundness and boldness in character as well as good acidity and balance. Importer: Roanoke Valley Wine Co, Roanoke, VA

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Readers are encouraged to consult the i-WineReview’s Report #9 Champagne for additional reviews of their favorite sparklers

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Crémants

Jean-Baptiste Adam NV Crémant de Alsace Brut Alsace ($10) 88

Lucien Albrecht NV Brut Blanc de Blancs Crémant d’Alsace ($20) 88
Very pale straw with abundant fine beads and a frothy appearance. Notes of pear and yeast on the nose. Elegant, creamy mouth feel with ripe pear flavors. Finishes long with touch of sweetness. Importer: Pasternak Wine Imports Harrison, NY
Lucien Albrecht NV Brut Rosé Crémant d’Alsace ($20) 87
Pale salmon with a pleasant mousse and a refined nose of strawberry and cherry fruit. Creamy, mouth-filling palate of straightforward flavors. Moderate, dry finish.
Importer: Pasternak Wine Imports Harrison, NY

Crémant de Bourgogne

Bailly Lapierre 2005 Brut Crémant de Bourgogne ($20) 88

Bailly Lapierre Reserve Brut NV Crémant de Bourgogne ($12) 87

Celine et Laurent Tripoz NV Crémant de Bourgogne ($8) 87
A delicious 100% Chardonnay sparkler. Golden straw in color with a nose of ripe mango fruit and mint that carry over on to a dry palate of exotic fruit flavors. Nicely balanced and easy to drink. Finishes dry. Importer: Elite Wines Lorton, VA

Frédéric Trouillet NV Crémant de Bourgogne ($18) 87
Light straw with a rich mousse and fine beads. Floral aromas with notes of ripe cherry pear and melon. Soft and creamy on the palate with delicate red berry fruit flavors, excellent balance and a pleasant finish. Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

L. Vitteaut-Alberti NV Crémant de Bourgogne Brut ($25) 89
Medium yellow straw with a nice bead and yeasty aromas on a nose of medium complexity. Creamy and rich on a vibrant palate with interesting depth of flavor of apple and pear fruit with leesy notes. Has the complexity of a good non-vintage champagne.

Charles Bove NV Brut, Loire Valley ($14) 87
Medium lemon gold. Sweet citrus aromas of Chenin Blanc with notes of banana peel. Moderately zesty and slightly tart on a fruit cocktail palate with a medium finish. Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

Bouvet NV Brut Rosé Loire Valley ($17) 86
This rosé of Cabernet Franc is medium salmon in color and offers an attractive nose of light cherry and rose petals with orange zest notes. It is lightly effervescent with a creamy palate and has understated flavors of light cherry with a dry finish. Importer: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Bouvet NV Saphir Brut Loire Valley ($18) 86
Pale lemon with a light bead and aromas of melon and a hint of lime. Nice round mouth feel. Very dry on the palate with modest fruit flavors and a crisp, dry finish. Importer: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Bouvet NV Signature Brut Loire Valley ($16) 86
Lemon yellow 90% Chenin Blanc, 10% Chardonnay blend. Lightly effervescent with ripe tropical fruit aromas. The palate is medium weight with ripe peach and apricot flavors. Importer: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Domaine d’Orfeuilles NV Vouvray Brut Loire Valley ($18) 88
Medium lemon with aromas of white flowers and peach notes. Zesty and creamy attack with rich white peach flavors. Dry and crisp on the palate with a good long finish. Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

Marquis de la Tour NV Brut Vin Mousseux Loire Valley ($11) 86
Pale green straw with a fine mousse and medium beads. Citrus aromas with slight petrol notes. Light fruit flavors on the palate and bone dry. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Marquis de la Tour NV Brut Rose Loire Valley ($11) 86
This salmon pink colored sparkler blends Cabernet Franc, Grolleau, Syrah and Grenache. It shows upfront fresh, fruity aromas of strawberry, cherry with an off-dry, strawberry fruit palate. It has a short but flavorful finish. Pair it with strawberry shortcake. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY
Charles de Fere NV Cuvée Jean-Louis Blanc de Blancs Brut ($9) 87
A blend of Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche, and Colombard. Pale straw with fresh apple and pear aromas and a touch of baking spice. Medium weight palate that is very clean, brisk, and fresh. Light fruit flavors and a very dry finish. Importer: Virginia Imports, Ltd. Alexandria, VA

Antech Blanquette de Limoux ($15) 88
Medium straw blend of Mauzac, Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc produced via méthode champenoise. Shows a fine bead and aromas of ripe honeydew melon and figs with a touch of smoke on the nose. Creamy attack with green apple flavors, crisp acidity, and a lingering finish. Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

Brundlmayer 2004 Brut Langelois Kamptal ($52) 87
Lemon yellow with a fine bead and an assertive yeasty, hops-like nose. Round and ripe on the palate with light ripe pear fruit and yeast notes with a somewhat short finish. Importer: Terry Thiese Estate Selections, Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Brundlmayer NV Brut Rosé Langelois Kamptal ($48) 88
Light orange salmon with a fine bead and aromas of light red fruit, yeast and, nuts. Creamy attack of strawberry fruit on a very dry palate. Would go well with lightly spiced shrimp. Importer: Terry Thiese Estate Selections, Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Leo Hillinger NV Secco Bugenland ($17) 88
Light salmon with an abundant mousse and a light, delicate nose of wild strawberries. Offers a nice, dry attack and a creamy mouth feel. Easy drinking and quite delicious with delicate strawberry flavors. Importer: KWSelection.com Select Wines Chantilly, VA

Steininger Gruner Veltliner Sekt Kamptal ($24) 88
Yellow gold with fine, active beads and very ripe aromas of apricot. Crisp and clean on the palate with ripe red apple flavors and a very nice creamy, mousse-like finish. With a little more complexity, it would deserve a higher score. Importer: KWSelection.com Select Wines Chantilly, VA

Steininger NV Zweigelt Sekt Kamptal ($29) 88
Dark purple with plum and herbal aromas reminiscent of Cabernet Franc. Vinous flavors of creamy plum fruit with a bitter chocolate note. Flavorful and will probably pair best with a dark chocolate tart. Importer: KWSelection.com Select Wines Chantilly, VA

Szigeti NV Brut Cuvee Prestige NV Burgenland ($36) 89
Pure gold blend of Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay with a rich nose of spicy, ripe pear tart. Dry palate of light fruit flavors with a creamy mouth feel. Comes together very nicely on a crisp, dry finish. Importer: VinDivino, Chicago, IL

Nyetimber 2001 Brut Classic Cuvee Sussex ($30) 90
Nyetimber is a wine estate planted by two Americans in the 1980s, subsequently purchased by Dutch entrepreneur Eric Heerema, and solely dedicated to sparkling wine. Blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Straw gold color with abundant tight bead and light mousse. Nose of Chardonnay fruit, citrus and water crackers. Elegant and creamy in the mouth with brisk acidity and a moderately complex palate of lemon citrus and yeast. Finishes long and exceptionally clean and bright. Could easily be mistaken for a good quality non-vintage Champagne. Not currently imported to the US.

Ridgeview 2005 Bloomsbury Cuvee Merret ($22) 87
Blend of 57% Chardonnay, 14% Pinot Noir, and 29% Pinot Meunier. Attractive lemon-gold with a nice bead and aromas of bread dough and green apple. The modestly fruited palate shows brisk acidity and a creamy edge, but the finish is a bit short. Not currently imported to the US.
Germany

Reischgraf von Kesselstatt 2002 Majoratsfullung Riesling Brut Mosel ($20) 88
Light yellow gold with light petrol notes on the nose. Appearance is bright with lively beads and a fresh creamy mousse. Has a zesty, bone dry palate of simple green apple flavors. Finishes pleasant, dry and a tad tart. Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

Schloss Gobelsburg NV Brut Reserve ($42) 89
Lemon yellow with a fine bead and an elegant, floral bouquet of tropical fruit with hazelnut notes. Rich, creamy mouthfeel with a complex palate of ripe guava, apple and yeast. Lingering finish. Quite delicious! Importer: Terry Thiese Estate Selections

Schumann Nagler NV Cuvée Rheingau Riesling Sekt Geisenheim, Rheingau ($24) 87
Pale lemon with active beads and fresh citrus and banana aromas. Clean, crisp attack with a dry palate of sweet melon and pear flavors. Finishes long with a sweet note. Importer: Billington Imports, Springfield, VA

Greece

Domaine Evharis NV Eva Vin Petillant ($22) 87
Sourced from vineyards on the slopes of the Gerania Mountains just a few kilometers from Athens. Two leading figures from the business world, Eva Boehme & Haris Antoniou are owners of this fine estate. Pale straw with neutral, sucrose-like aromas and a crisp, clean attack. Very ripe, sweet fruit flavors on the palate. A low-alcohol (10%) wine to drink very cold on a hot day. Importer: Trieme Imports, Huntersville, NC

Domaine Tselepos NV Amalia Brut Sparkling Peloponnese ($19) 88
A very aromatic méthode champenoise sparkling wine made from 100 percent Moschafiler grapes showing peach, tangerine, and honeysuckle on the nose. While the palate is dry, the attack is slightly honeyed and fruity. Finishes nicely with a touch of sweetness. Importer: Dionysos Imports, Manassas, VA Lorton, VA

Italy

Asti, Brachetto d' Acqui, Moscato d'Asti Sparklers

Azienda Agricola Barbero Cascina Fonda Moscato Di Asti, Piedmont ($19) 86
100% Moscato Bianco. Starbright with perfumed herbal and grass aromas and a sweet palate of green table grapes. Finishes sweet and short. Importer: Dionysos Imports Manassas, VA

Azienda Barbero Cascina Fonda Brachetto Piedmont ($24) 87
Light ruby with a moderately frothy mousse. Rich aromas of ripe cherry fruit compote and rose petal. Moderately spritzy and sugary sweet on the palate with a persistent sweet finish and aftertaste. Importer: Dionysos Imports Manassas, VA

Cinzano NV Sparkling Asti ($12) 88
Pale gold, 100% Moscato. Rich and creamy mousse, highly aromatic, with a sweet fruity palate of melon, peaches and pear. Lovely in the mouth. A terrific dessert sparkler. Serve with angel food cake. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Cinzano NV Rosé Piedmont ($12) 86
Pink salmon. A sparkling blend of four indigenous grapes with a perfumed mousse of fresh strawberry and a crisp dry palate of fresh light red fruit and melon flavors. Easy drinking. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Cinzano NV Sparkling Brachetto d'Acqui ($17) 88
Medium ruby with an attractive frothy mousse. Refined cherry aromas with moderate spritz and ripe cherry fruit flavors on a creamy palate. Pleasant and refreshing to drink without the cloying sweetness of some Sparkling Brachetto. A delicious fruity wine with just the right amount of dryness on the palate. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Vinicola Marenco, Brachetto d‘Acqui, Piedmont ($28) 87
Dark ruby with a frothy mousse and black cherry zest of 100% Brachetto. Ripe red berry fruit aromas with notes of rose petal. Fruity and refreshing on the palate with a pleasant dry finish. Importer: Vias, New York, NY
Vinicola Marenco Moscato d’Asti Scrapona ($22) 87
Pale straw color with lovely assertive aromas of melon and yeast with a palate of ripe apricots and sweet apple. Nice, fruity finish. Quite clean, fresh, and low in alcohol (5.5%). Importer: Vias, New York, NY

Vigne Regali 2007 Rosa Regale Brachetto d’Acqui Piedmont ($22) 88

Villa Guida, 2007 Moscato D’Asti “Andrea” Piedmont ($17) 88
A 100% Moscato Bianco. Medium lemon with frothy bubbles and aromas of tangerine, figs and almonds. Mildly effervescent with creamy, apricot tart flavors. Finishes long and sweet. Great dessert wine! Importer: Vin Divino, Chicago, IL

Franciacorta

Bellavista NV Franciacorta Brut Cuvée NV Lombardy ($52) 91
Light lemon blend of 90% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Bianco and Pinot Nero. The mousse is white, lively and persistent with small, long-lasting bubbles. Elegant, perfumed aromas of ripe pear with touches of lees and anise. Excellent acidity on the delicate, refined, and somewhat understated palate. Integrated flavors of lees and pear fruit. Would make a lovely aperitif wine! Importer: Empson USA Inc., Alexandria VA

Bellavista NV Franciacorta Gran Cuvée Satèn Lombardy ($82) 92
Medium lemon gold with a lively bead and autolytic nose of melon, toasted hazelnuts, and lees. Has an elegant, full-flavored, creamy palate of honeydew melon that is beautifully balanced and integrated. Elegant! Importer USA Inc., Alexandria VA

Bellavista 2002 Franciacorta Pas Opere Lombardy ($85) 94
Deep gold with a fine, elegant bead and a fragrant nose of tropical flowers, freshly baked bread, and a touch of roasted nuts. A rich and creamy mouth feel with excellent depth of flavors of stone fruits and summer melon. Fully integrated and balanced. Delicate and harmonious with a crisp and refreshing finish. Absolutely gorgeous! Importer USA Inc., Alexandria VA

Cá del Bosco NV Cuvée Prestige Brut Lombardy ($53) 89
Solid yellow gold, attractive blend of 75% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Bianco and 15% Pinot Nero. Mildly effervescent with a very fine mousse and rich creamy nose of peaches, apricots and nuts. Dry palate with flavors of caramelized nuts and dried apricots followed by a long lasting finish. Importer: Terlato Wine International, Hoboken, NJ

Cá del Bosco 2003 Franciacorta Satén Lombardy ($82) 92
A lemon gold, bubbly Chardonnay with a complex nose of yeast and lemon zest with all the richness and complexity of Champagne. Elegant, creamy palate with light and delicate melon flavors with notes of almond and saltiness. Elegant and yeasty finish. Clearly at the top of the available Franciacorta sparklers. Importer: Terlato Wine International, Hoboken, NJ

Uberti NV Magnificentia Satén Lombardy (EUR 34€) 93
Lemon yellow with a rich mousse. Fragrant aromas of melon with spritz and fresh flavors on the palate and light yeasty notes. Rich and creamy in the mouth with a slightly butter-like character. Exceptional! Not currently imported to the US.
Prosecco

Bisol 2007 Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Brut Crede Veneto ($26) 88
Light-medium straw blend of 85% Prosecco, 5% Verdiso and 10% Pinot Bianco. Shows a rich mousse with light pear and melon aromas. Clean and crisp tasting on the palate with light pear flavors and a dry finish. Very refreshing! Importer: VIAS New York, NY

Bisol Prosecco Jeio Veneto ($18) 87
Medium straw colored, 100% Prosecco with a fine bead and light, clean aromas of pear, melon and mint. Simple clean fruity flavors and crisp on the bone-dry palate. Finishes clean. Importer: VIAS New York, NY

Canella NV Prosecco di Conegliano Veneto ($19) 88
Light lemon color with fine beads. Fresh and clean aromas of ripe apple and pear which continue on to the palate. Crisp and zesty attack with creamy mouth feel and a solid finish. Well done. Importer: Empson USA Inc, Alexandria, VA

Canella NV Prosecco VQA Veneto ($16) 86
Pale lemon color, 100% Prosecco. Light in character with neutral aromas on the nose and light fruit on the palate. Easy drinking with a short satisfying finish. Importer: Empson USA Inc Alexandria, VA

Caposaldo NV Prosecco Veneto ($15) 87
Light straw color with fine beads and aromas of green apple and citrus. Brisk, light, and frothy attack followed by a creamy mouth feel of citrusy flavors. Pleasant and easy drinking—a good way to start a meal. Importer: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Marcato Durello NV Veneto ($16) 86
Yellow gold blend of 85% Durello, 15% Chardonnay aged on the lees for 8 months. Shows light yeast aromas and a soft attack with a touch of sweetness on the palate. Light and creamy style. Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils, Ltd Winchester, VA

Nino Franco NV Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Veneto ($21) 87
Medium straw color with a rich mousse and fine, rich ripe citrus aromas with pear notes. Has a Big, creamy mouthfeel on a lightly flavored palate. Crisp, dry finish. Importer: Vin Divino, Chicago, IL

Nino Franco 2007 Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Veneto ($30) 87
Pale lemon color with a creamy mousse and aromas of spearmint and citrus. The attack is brisk and creamy, with a palate of light fruit flavors and a dry, creamy finish. Importer: VinDivino, Chicago, IL

Rebuli NV Prosecco di Valdobbiadene, Extra Dry VSQPRD ($23) 86
Very pale straw with a fine mousse. and bead. Aromas of fresh pear with a touch of marzipan. Light on the attack with flavors of pear and fennel on a soft, light and slightly sweet palate. Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils, Ltd Winchester, VA

Zardetto NV Brut Prosecco Prosecco di Conegliano ($15) 88
Light straw, 100% Prosecco with a rich mousse and aromas of apple and fennel. Rich, creamy, and round on the palate with good depth and persistence of flavor. Crisp and lively on the finish. Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Zardetto NV Private Cuvée Sparkling Veneto ($12) 87
Light straw, lovely blend of Prosecco, Chardonnay and other grapes showing a rich mousse and lively bubbles. Fresh aromas of apple and pear and flavors of green apple and citrus on a crisp palate. Nicely delineated and bright with a good finish. Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Zardetto 2007 Zeta Prosecco di Conegliano ($22) 90
Medium yellow gold with fine beads and complex aromas of ripe melon, fig and anise. Soft and creamy on the palate with a rich mouth feel and ripe berry fruit. Very satisfying with lots of depth and a long sustaining finish. A lovely delicate Prosecco! Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Other Premium Italian Bruts and Sparklers

Bisol NV Jeio Cuvée Rose Brut Veneto ($18) 88
Light salmon blend of 50% Merlot and 50% Pinot Noir with a fine mousse and light cherry aromas with a touch of sweetness. Pleasant mouthfeel on a light and delicate palate of light red fruit flavors that is a tad off-dry. A great aperitif drink! Importer: VIAS New York, NY
Bruno Giacosa 2004 Spumante Extra Brut Piedmont ($60) 89
Medium lemon color with a lively bead, rich mousse, and attractive floral aromas followed by a crisp dry zesty attack and a rich creamy mouth feel. The fruit is rather neutral, but the wine is alive with zest and depth. The finish is rich tasting, long and bone dry. Very well done! Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Canella NV Brut Spumante Veneto ($23) 86
Light lemon in color with neutral aromas on the nose and the rather light palate. Importer: Empson USA Inc Alexandria, VA

Canella NV Rose Vino Spumante Veneto ($19) 86
A pale salmon 100% Pinot Nero (Pinot Noir). Has a a dry attack and moderate cherry and strawberry fruit flavors with touches of sweetness and spice. Delicate and modest tasting. Importer: Empson USA Inc Alexandria, VA

Canella NV Vino Spumante Brut Alto Adige ($20) 88
A brut produced from 100% Chardonnay. Light lemon with assertive aromas of fresh green apple. Crisp on the bone dry attack with creamy roundness and balance on the palate. Flavors rather neutral with a slightly tart long lasting finish. Less creamy and more spritzy than most Proseccos. Importer: Empson USA Inc Alexandria, VA

Cavit NV Altemasi Riserva Graal Trento ($36) 90
A yellow gold, tasty wine made in small quantities by the metodo classico. A blend of 80% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Nero. Aromas of rich, ripe baked pineapple with lees notes. Very fresh, crisp and rich attack with ripe tropical fruit flavors on the well-balanced palate. Finishes dry with lingering notes of honey and pineapple. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Costaripa NV Brut Metodo Classico Lombardy ($41) 90
A 100% Chardonnay spumante sourced from top vineyards in Valtenesi and Franciacorta and produced by the metodo classico. Partially fermented in small oak casks with secondary fermentation in the bottle. Medium lemon in color with complex aromas of lees and tangerine citrus followed by an attractive creamy mouth feel with fresh honey and pear flavors on a fresh palate. Excellent acidity and balance and a rich long finish. Nice, dry, crisp finish. Importer: Empson USA Inc Alexandria, VA

Ferrari NV Brut Trento DOC ($25) 89
Medium lemon,100% Chardonnay with abundant mousse showing prominent oak aromas on the nose. Soft and delicate on the creamy-textured palate with lees flavors. Offers a slightly tart finish like some pinot grigios. A true food wine. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Ferrari NV Perle Trento DOC ($33) 90
Brilliant yellow gold with a fine mousse and yeasty light caramel, slightly oxidative, ripe aromas. Elegant, round and ripe on the palate with flavors of apricot, butter pecan and a dry finish. Have with chicken tagine or other spicy food. Aged on the lees for four years. Importer: Palm Bay International, Port Washington, NY

Murgo 2005 Brut Etna DOC ($33) 88
A flavorful sparkling wine produced from the Nerello Mascalese grape cultivated on the hillsides of Mt. Etna in Sicily. Medium straw color with a fine bead and aromas of yeast and green apple. Attack of ripe fruit and citrus flavors. Very dry on the palate with good acidity, finesse and balance, although it is somewhat austere on the mid-palate. Clearly, a food wine. Importer: Domaine Select, New York, NY

Tasca D'Almerita 2004 Brut Contea di Sciafani, Sicily ($55) 90
Tasca D’Almerita is without question one of Sicily's finest estates. We have previously tasted their wines, including their 2003 Brut Contea de Sciafani, made from 100% Chardonnay. The current bottling exhibits a yellow gold color, a fine bead and a rich mousse. On the nose, it reveals lovely aromas of tropical fruit and toasted oak that are seamlessly integrated. On the palate it offers rich flavors of pineapple, white peaches and orange zest with a creamy rich mouth feel and a long finish. This is every bit as good as the 2003 vintage. Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Vigne Regali NV Banfi Brut Piedmont ($24) 90
Medium lemon blend of 50% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay and 10% Pinot Blanc fermented in the bottle for 24 months. Shows a rich mousse and lively bubbles with warm yeasty aromas and light red berry notes. Brisk and dry with crisp acidity on a creamy palate of delicate red fruit flavors. Fresh and lively! Importer: Banfi Old Brookville, NY
Portugal

Herdade do Esporão 2004 Brut Portugal ($19) 87
A sparkler from one of Portugal's top producers in the Alentejo. Lemon gold with a fine bead and ripe aromas of tropical fruit, jasmine, and nuts. Round on the palate with light melon and pear and hints of toast and nuts. Finishes clean. Importer: Dionysos Imports Manassas, VA

São Domingos NV Sparkling Wine Semi Dry ($12) 87
Medium lemon gold with a small bead and a floral nose. Creamy, off-dry, nutty apple-pear flavors with a touch of anise on the palate and a very nice off-dry lingering finish. Dionysos Imports, Manassas, VA

Spain

Agusti Torello Mata 2004 Aliguer Brut Cava ($14) 87
Pale straw with aromas of apple pie, hay and herbal notes. Moderately rich and crisp on the palate with ripe fruit flavors, round mouth feel and a long lasting dry finish. A pleasant fruity style. Importer: Casa Ventura Imports Bellingham, WA

Agusti Torello Mata 2004 Brut Reserva Cava ($20) 86
Light straw in color with moderate effervescence and aromas suggesting honeydew melon, fennel and some leesy notes. Rather simple and light tasting on the palate with moderate fruit flavors. Importer: Casa Ventura Imports Bellingham, WA

Agusti Torello Mata 2003 Kripta Brut Nature Gran Reserva Cava ($75) 90
Medium straw with a very fine bead and fresh baked bread and floral aromas. Very dry and crisp attach with ripe fruit on a creamy palate of yeasty notes. Finish is long lasting, crisp and dry and slightly tart. Packaged in an attractive and unique cone-shaped bottle. Importer: Casa Ventura Imports Bellingham, WA

Can Nadal de la Boadella 2003 Gran Reserva Cava ($20) 88
Medium lemon blend of Parellada, Macabeu and Xarello grapes sourced from low-yielding 40-year old vineyards. Ripe citrus aromas with a touch of lees on the nose. Round and creamy on the palate with ripe fruit and more leesy notes. Nicely balance with a dry crisp finish. Importer: Steve Miles Selections Denver, CO

Capdevila Pujol NV Brut Cava ($15) 87
Lemon gold with a fine bead and leesy, yeasty aromas of baked apple. The palate offers light apple and pear fruit with yeasty notes followed by a dry lingering finish. Importer: Antalva Imports, Inc Los Angeles, CA

Cavas Pares Balta NV Brut Cava ($15) 88
Medium straw with a fine bead and aromas of fresh melon and a palate of apple and pear. Shows a creamy mouth feel, yet crisp with a dry and persistent finish. Importer: Boutique Wine Collection

Codorníu NV Original Cava ($8) 89
Medium gold color with a gentle foamy mousse and clean bead. Lovely perfumed aromas of toast, lemon zest, and ripe fruit. Rich, creamy mouth feel with a lightly flavored palate of lees and a nice round finish. Distributor: Virginia Imports, Ltd. Alexandria, VA

Codorníu NV Pinot Noir Brut Cava ($11) 87

Conde de Subirats NV Brut Cava ($11) 87
Pale straw with a foamy mousse and sweet aromas of apple and citrus with a fennel note. Dry and fruity attack with light effervescence and gentle fruit flavors on the palate. Importer: Grapes of Spain, VA

Conde de Subirats NV Brut Rosé NV Cava ($11) 87
Medium pink rose blend of 90% Trepat, and 10% Pinot Noir displaying aromas of yeast, fresh raspberry and pomegranate fruit. Pleasing palate of fresh light red fruit with a touch of yeast. Very dry and fruity on the finish. Importer: Grapes of Spain, VA

Cristalino NV Brut Cava ($9) 89
Cristalino 2003 Brut Finca El Padruell Cava (NA) 90
Cristalino NV Extra Dry Cava ($9) 87
Cristalino NV Rosé Cava ($9) 86
These excellent Cavas produced by winemaker Jaume Serra, all made by the méthode champenoise. Stylistically they have notable touches of leesy fruit flavors and off dry finishes. They also are offered at bargain prices. The NV Brut is aromatic with a spritzy crisp attack of tropical fruit and sherry-like notes on the palate with a persistent flavorful finish. The tasty 2003 Brut Finca El Padruell is the best of the four Cavas under review. It displays a deep gold color with a fine mousse. It has a complex
oxidative character with aromas of hazelnut and ripe tropical fruit on the nose and a creamy palate layered with yeasty notes. The **Extra Dry Cava** also shows sherry aromas, pear and melon fruit and a touch of sweetness on a full-flavored finish. The **NV Rosé** made of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Trepat is dark salmon in color with a gentle floral spritzy nose, a touch of strawberry and cherry on the palate and an off-dry finish. Importer: CIV USA Sacramento, CA

**Don Conde NV Brut Cava ($10) 88**
Lemon gold and fine beaded with a foamy mousse and light floral and fruit aromas. Rich and creamy on the palate with lightly flavored apple and pear fruit. Crisp and dry on the finish. Importer: Country Vintner, Oliveville, VA

**Bodegas Felix Lorenzo Cachazo NV Carrasviñas Brut Rueda ($21) 89**
A sparkler produced via the *metodo tradicional* from 100% Verdejo, the principal white grape of Rueda. Medium straw gold color with a nice fine bead and clean, yeasty and assertive hazelnut aromas which extend to the palate, which shows modest signs of Verdejo. Finishes dry, crisp and long with real character. Importer: Las Arribes LLC/Manolo's Wines Bloomington, IN

**Can Rafols dels Caus Gran Caus Gran Reserva 2003 (EUR 13€) 93**
In addition to making excellent white and red wines, this winery produces Cavas that exhibit oxidized notes and complex aromas and flavors that are relatively rare in Spanish Cava. To the experienced taster, they are reminiscent of the Champagnes of Anselm Selosse and Bertrand Gautherot. The 2003 Gran Reserva is green-tinged, straw gold color with a minimum of three years aging in bottle. Intense nose of figs, ripe melon, honey, and licorice with notes of pastry cream and fresh bread. Complex attack with flavors of malt, olive oil, minerals and almond cream. Very long finish of dried fruit. (tasted by Miguel Reinares in Spain; not yet available in the US market)

**Can Rafols dels Caus Gran Caus Rosado Extra Brut 2004 (EUR 17€) 92**
Rose with onion skin color, 100% Pinot Noir. On the nose, aromatic fruit aromas of strawberry and cherry with pleasing oxidative notes. Rich and unctuous mouth feel reminiscent of a full-bodied wine. Shows a long finish. (tasted by Miguel Reinares in Spain; not yet available in the US market)

**Celler Batlle Gramona Imperial Gran Reserva 2004 (EUR 18€) 90**
For more than 125 years the Gramona family has made some of the best Spanish sparkling wine. These wines are elegant, easy to enjoy, and have a good sense of terroir. The 2004 Gran Reserva is a green-tinged, straw yellow blend of Xarel.lo 50%, Macabeo 40% and Chardonnay 10%. Fine and constant mousse with an elegant and harmonious bouquet of crackers, ripe pear, white flowers and yeast. Excellent balance of acidity and sweetness on the palate with touches of turron and hazelnuts. Complex but easy to drink. (tasted by Miguel Reinares in Spain; limited available in the US market through European Cellars, Charlotte, NC)

**Celler Batlle Gramona III Lustros Gran Reserva 2001 (EUR 23€) 90**
Golden straw blend of 70% Xarel.lo and 30% Macabeo with more than 5 years of aging. Very fine and persistent bubbles. Aromas of lees, baked goods, nuts, and hints of toffee. Abundant flavors of stone fruit and white figs with a soft, honey-like mouth feel. Medium long finish. (tasted by Miguel Reinares in Spain; limited availability in the US market through European Cellars, Charlotte, NC)

**Gran Sarao Brut Cava ($12) 89**
Medium lemon gold blend of 40% Xarel.lo, 30%, Macabeo, 20%, Parellada and 10% Chardonnay aged for 12-15 months on the lees. Shows light bubbles and toast aromas. Tart and crisp on the palate with tropical fruit flavors. Finishes clean with a note of sweetness. Importer: Steve Miles Selections Denver, CO

**Gran Sarao Rosé Cava ($12) 88**
Dark rose, 100% Trepat with a nose of ripe cherry. Crisp attack with a creamy palate of dried cherry fruit. Nice, long, dry and tart finish. Importer: Steve Miles Selections Denver, CO

**Huguet de Can Feixes 2005 Cava Gran Reserva Brut Nature ($29) 89**
An attractive blend of Montonec, Macabeo and Pinot Noir sourced from high altitude mountainside vineyards. Medium lemon with aromas of citrus and light yeast. Soft, rich, creamy mouth feel with more citrus fruit on the palate. Dry and persistent on the finish. Importer: Classical Wines of Spain Seattle, WA
Juvé y Camps NV Brut Rosé Cava ($17)  90
Medium rose with a rich creamy mousse and interesting nose of minerals and dried cherry. Very nice creamy palate of light cherry. Crisp and dry with a long creamy finish. Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Juvé y Camps 2004 Brut Cinta Púrpura Cava ($14) 91
Medium yellow gold with fine beads and rich aromas of toast and light roasted nuts. Creamy mouth feel on the palate with lovely, rich flavors of melon, pear and lees and nut notes. Elegant and rich with an incredibly long finish! Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Juvé y Camps 2004 Reserva de La Familia Cava ($15) 89
Light lemon color with a fine mousse and bead and aromas of citrus with petrol notes. Very dry and crisp on a stony, fairly rich palate with light, nutty notes. Lingering light citrus notes on the finish. Importer: Winebow Montvale, NJ

Maria Casanovas 2004 Brut Nature Gran Reserva Cava ($40) 90
Straw gold blend of 40% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir and 20% other Cava varieties with a lively mousse and aromas of citrus. Has a creamy, leesy palate with notes of roasted nuts, pear and green apple. Beautifully balanced with a lingering finish. Well done! Importer: Grapes of Spain, Lorton, VA

Maria Casanovas 2004 Brut Nature Pinot Noir Cava ($45) 90
Light red tinged with orange showing a fine mousse with aromas of strawberry jam. Flavors of pure strawberry and blueberry fruit on a lively palate that is tart with good acidity. Has a good, lingering finish. Importer: Grapes of Spain, Lorton, VA

Mont Marcal Vinicola 2005 Brut Rose Reserva Cava ($15) 88
Medium dark rose color with light red fruit aromas of 100% Trepat. Very dry, crisp and clean attack leading to a lightly flavored palate with hints of cherry and a dry lingering finish. Importer: Classical Wines of Spain Seattle, WA

Mont Marcal Vinicola NV Brut Extremarium Cava ($21) 90
Lemon gold blend of Xarel-lo, Macabeo, Parellada and Chardonnay with a fine bead and frothy mousse and delicate and lightly perfumed aromas of pear and melon with a touch of hay. Exhibits an elegant, smooth, creamy palate with apple and lemon zest. Crisp and steely through to the finish. Importer: Classical Wines of Spain Seattle, WA

Montsarra NV Brut Cava ($23) 91
Medium straw color with a fine, vibrant bead and an elegant, creamy, leesy nose of fresh fruit. Very creamy mousse on a complex palate of green apple, lees, and nuts. Round and mouth-filling with a lingering finish. Excelentísimo! Importer: Broadbent Selections Inc., CA

Bodegas Muga Conde de Haro (EUR 13€) 88
Bodegas Muga enjoys well-earned fame in Rioja for its superb red wines. Few people know that in the same Haro winery Muga also produces a traditional Cava with the name Conde de Haro. This Cava is a green-gold blend of 90% Viura (Macabeo) and 10% Malvasía with a fine bead and a nose of white fruit, flowers, bitter almond, and light touches of vanilla. There are white fruit, lees, and baked goods flavors on the palate with a dry, spicy finish with notes of stone fruit. (tasted by Miguel Reinares in Spain; not yet available in the US market)

Poema NV Brut Cava ($12) 91
Light yellow gold with yeasty aromas, a foamy mousse and a fine bead. Reveals a lovely, creamy mouth feel and flavors of pears, citrus and toast. Finishes dry with lingering fruit and spices. Very good and offered at a bargain price. Importer: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Poema NV Extra Dry Cava ($12) 88
Pale straw with a very fine mousse and floral and citrus aromas. The palate is lightly flavored with a creamy mouth feel and finish. Importer: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY
Raventos i Blanc 2003 Gran Reserva de la Finca Cava ($40) 91
The Gran Reserva de la Finca spends 36 months on the lees. The result is a lovely lemon gold color and complex citrus and yeast aromas on the nose. On the palate it offers a rich and creamy mouth feel with crisp, clean flavors of apple and pear, beautiful balance and a persistent finish. Excellent winemaking! Importer: Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

Raventos i Blanc 2005 L’Hereu Reserva Brut Cava ($20) 89
The L’Hereu Reserva Brut spends 20 months on the lees. It exhibits a light lemon color with a fine bead and offers light apple, citrus and yeast aromas on the nose. Very clean and inviting on the palate. Nicely balanced with good acidity and a persistent finish. Importer: Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY

U Mes u Fan Tres 0 1+1=3 Brut Cava ($11) 87
Light straw with steely apple aromas and light effervescence. Nice and tart on the palate with straightforward flavors of pear and apple. Finishes fairly long with crisp fruit. A blend of 45% Xarel-lo, 30% Parellada and 25% Macabeo. Importer: Grapes of Spain, Lorton, VA

United States
Oregon

Argyle Winery
Argyle is a producer of excellent méthode champenoise sparkling wines, and premium Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Located in the Willamette Valley, it sources fruit for its sparkling wines from three vineyards in the Dundee Hills. All of Argyle’s sparkling wines are vintage dated. Winemaking is under the direction of the talented Rollin Soles.

Argyle 2000 Knudsen Vineyard Brut, Dundee Hills ($40) 89

ARGYLE 2000 Blanc de Blancs, Julia Lee’s Block, Dundee Hills ($40) 91
100% Dijon clone Chardonnay. Medium yellow gold color, showing a very nice mousse with abundant fine bubbles and spearmint and almond aromas. Round and moderately creamy on the palate with flavors of red apple, ripe pear, and a touch of smoke. Rich and long lasting finish.

Argyle 1998 Extended Tirage, Willamette Valley ($50) 90
Light yellow gold blend of 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir showing honey and tropical fruit aromas. Very nicely balanced with an integrated, creamy rich palate of moderate acidity and rich fruit flavors. Very long, flavorful finish. An excellent food wine!

Argyle 2006 Brut Rosé, Willamette Valley ($30) 92
Salmon pink blend of 65% Pinot Meunier and 35% Pinot Noir with a lovely, refined mousse and beautiful appearance. Shows a nose of strawberries, cherries, and almonds with light oxidized notes. There’s brisk acidity and a creamy mouth feel on the very well balanced palate with flavors of light cranberry, yeast, and custard and a long lasting finish. Absolutely beautiful!

California

Ballatore NV Gran Spumante California ($8) 87
Ballatore NV Rosso Red Spumante California ($8) 87
The Gran Spumante is fashioned along the lines of an Asti sparkling wine, but for an American palate. A blend of Malvasia Blanca and Burger, it is highly aromatic and perfumed with a creamy sweet mouth feel and flavors of peaches and apricots. It is easy to see how this wine and the Rosso would work well with wedding cake and desserts. These are great values! The Rosso Red Spumante is a red berry sweet equivalent to the Gran Spumante. It has an attractive rose color with sweet cherry and Muscat-like flavors on the palate. No doubt a big hit at festive occasions and a great value!
Barefoot Bubbly NV Brut Cuvee California ($10) 87
Barefoot Bubbly NV Chardonnay Champagne California ($11) 86
Barefoot Bubbly NV Pinot Grigio California ($11) 87
Barefoot Bubbly NV Premium Extra Dry California ($10) 87
Barefoot Bubbly NV White Zinfandel California ($11) 86
These are low-budget sparklers mainly made from Chardonnay and blended with other fruity varieties such as Muscat and Symphony, a blend of Muscat of Alexandria and Grenache Gris. They also offer a Pinot Grigio and a White Zinfandel. Stylistically these wines are spritzy with apple and citrus aromas and moderate fruit flavors. They have different levels of sweetness and are generally tart on the finish. These wines are made mainly for consumers who like their sparklers fruity, semi-dry, and easy-drinking and they are all very well made and packaged attractively.

Domaine Carneros 2004 NV Brut Carneros ($30) 89
This sparkler exhibits a medium lemon color with a frothy mousse and aromas of apple, pear, and yeast notes. It is rich and creamy in the mouth and offers a nice combination of green fruit and yeast. It also has good complexity excellent overall structure and a dry finish. Distributor: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Domaine Carneros NV Brut Rosé Cuvée de la Pompadour Carneros ($40) 88
This attractive rosé displays a medium pink salmon color with fragrant aromas of light red raspberry and almonds. It offers a flavorful, creamy palate of light cherry and strawberry fruit with medium acidity and a clean dry finish. Distributor: Kobrand Corporation Purchase, NY

Domaine Chandon
Moët & Chandon was one of the first Champagne houses in France to recognize the great potential of California for the production of sparkling wine. In the early 1970s it purchased 800 acres in the Napa Valley and has been producing sparkling wines of good quality at highly competitive prices ever since. The wines reviewed here are a selection from their fine portfolio. The Reserve Pinot Noir is a new release. The Étoile Brut Sur Lees is their top of the line cuvée.

Domaine Chandon NV Brut Classic California ($22) 87
Medium straw color displaying a rich mousse with aromas of apple, pear and melon enriched by notes of brioche. Offers a medium-bodied palate of ripe pear, nuts, and melon flavors. Good acidity and balance with a pleasant dry finish.

Domaine Chandon NV Reserve Pinot Noir North Coast ($30) 88
A lovely light ruby orange revealing a subtle nose of dried cherry. Crisp and dry on the palate with pleasant creaminess. Light dried cherry on the palate along with a dry refreshing mid-palate and a long dry finish.

Domaine Chandon NV Blanc de Noir California ($22) 88
Light salmon color with a beautiful, long lasting mousse. Cherry tart aromas with rich pastry and cherry notes. Shows a crisp, clean attack with some creaminess and a rich, round mouth feel with high toned cherry fruit flavors. Finishes pleasantly dry.

Gloria Ferrer Vineyard 2004 Blanc de Blancs Carneros ($24) 88
Lemon yellow with fine beads displaying a very aromatic nose of pear, apple and yeast notes. Offers a rich and creamy mouth feel of good acidity and balance and a palate of ripe pear and citrus. Finishes moderately dry.

Gloria Ferrer Vineyard 2001 Royal Cuvée Brut Vintage Reserve Carneros ($32) 89
Lemon yellow color blend of 67% Pinot Noir and 33% Chardonnay, whole cluster pressed and made with free run juice, with a rich mousse and a very aromatic, fruity nose of melon and ripe pear. Shows a nice fruity attack and a lovely mouth feel with fine bubbles. Attractive and easy drinking California style!
Iron Horse Vineyards

Iron Horse is one of California’s top producers of high quality sparkling wines. Located in Sonoma’s Green Valley (which is also part of the Russian River Valley), the winery works some 160 acres of vines planted to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. It produces estate bottled sparkling wines following the méthodé champenoise which includes extended lees aging in bottle. Iron Horse produces exemplary sparkling wines. Regional Distributor: Virginia Imports, Alexandria, VA

Iron Horse Vineyards 2002 Blanc de Blancs Green Valley-Russian River ($38) 88
A starbright lemon yellow, 100% barrel fermented Chardonnay with aromas of toasty oak, spice, floral notes, and honeydew melon. Crisp acidity on the palate with a creamy leasy mouth feel, bright fruit flavors and a soft finish. Good with shellfish and white fish.

Iron Horse Vineyards 1996 LD Blancs de Blanc Sonoma Coast-Green Valley ($80) 92
This yellow gold sparkler is a blend of 50% Chardonnay and 50% Pinot Noir with very fine beads and attractive perfumed aromas of honey and flowers. It has a very dry, leesy palate with nuanced flavors and excellent balance that is firm and full-flavored in the mouth. A complex wine to drink slowly and savor!

Iron Horse Vineyards 2003 Classic Vintage Brut Green Valley-Russian River ($33) 87
Lemon gold color with aromas of red apple with yeasty notes, followed by a crisp attack of lovely citrus flavors. Nicely balanced and well made but rather austere on the palate and the finish.

Iron Horse Vineyards 2005 Wedding Cuveé Green Valley-Russian River ($38) 87
A lovely blend of 87% Pinot Noir and 13% Chardonnay aged three years on yeast in the bottle. Shows fresh bread and floral aromas, a moderately dry palate of apple and pear, and a very dry, tart, crisp finish.

Iron Horse Vineyards 2003 Russain Cuvee Green Valley-Russian River ($33) 88
A bright lemon gold blend of 70% Pinot Noir and 30% Chardonnay aged 4 years on yeast in the bottle. Reveals ripe pear and bitter almond aromas with a touch of lees and a full mouth feel mouth with nice fresh fruit flavors. Squeaky clean and finishes crisply with good acidity.

J Wine Company

Located in Healdsburg, California, the J Wine Company produces a host of world class sparkling wines in the Russian River Valley. Founded in 1986 by Judy Jordan, J owns and farms a total of 250 acres of highly diverse hillside and valley floor vineyards devoted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. J practices meticulous vineyard management and wine making following the “méthode champenoise”. J’s Brut sparkling wines are always made in the dry style with a dosage made from reserve Chardonnay and cane sugar. The sparkling wines reviewed here are only a few of the many terroir-driven sparkling wines produced by this outstanding winery. Regional Distributor: Virginia Imports, Ltd. Alexandria, VA

J Vineyards NV Cuvée 20 Brut Non-Vintage Russian River Valley ($28) 89
Medium straw with very fine bead. Sweet, fruit forward nose of tropical fruit with a touch of light lees. Clean and fruity on a silky, creamy palate of pear flavors. Bright acidity and good balance.

J Vineyards 1997 RR Vintage Brut Late Disgorged Russian River Valley ($115) 93
This bright lemon gold, luxurious Tete de Cuvee shows lees, toast, and tropical fruit on the nose and a very creamy, mousse like attack. Very nicely balanced with good acidity, fresh fruit, and lees character. Elegant, suave, and beautifully crafted!

J Vineyards 1999 Vintage Brut Russian River Valley ($50) 91
Pale lemon gold with a very fine active bead and a Champagne-like, rich autolytic nose of dried apricot and yeast. Very dry, crisp, rich palate of ripe pear and lees flavors. Beautifully balanced with a very clean finish. A lovely wine!

J Vineyards and Winery Brut Rose Russian River Valley ($40) 92
Very pale salmon with a rich fine mousse and lovely nose of freshly baked bread, light cherry and touch of anise. Shows a silky and elegant palate of light cherry fruit, almond flowers, and minerals with a beautiful lingering finish. Understated but absolutely delicious!
Roederer Estate

Yellow gold with complex aromas of lees, toasted almonds, brioche and touches of anise. Gorgeous, harmonious palate of creamy autolytic flavors, hazelnuts, and dried figs with oxidized notes. Very long and delicious on the finish with lingering notes of marzipan. California sparkling wine at its very best!

Established in Anderson Valley in the mid 1980s by the Champagne house of Louis Roederer, this winery is today one of California’s finest producers of sparkling wine. Roederer Estate sources its fruit from four vineyards totaling 400 acres. These sparkling wines are made following the house style of Louis Roederer and are almost similar in quality to their Champagnes, although they are definitely New World in character. Winemaker Michel Salgues has had a profound influence over the development of this great estate.

Roederer Estate NV Anderson Valley Brut
Anderson Valley ($17) 90
Pale straw blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Perfumed, integrated nose of light pristine cherry and apple fruit with yeasty notes. Mildly effervescent with rich fruit flavors of green apple with good acidity. Very, very dry finish. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Roederer Estate NV Anderson Valley Brut Rosé Anderson Valley ($23) 91
Medium salmon with very fine beads and yeast, brioche and cherry fruit aromas. Fresh, creamy attack with bright cherry flavors and almond notes on a dry, moderately complex rich palate. Finishes clean and dry with bright cherry notes. A beautiful wine that’s great with food. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Roederer Estate 2000 L’ Ermitage Brut Anderson Valley ($45) 94

Scharffenberger Brut Anderson Valley ($23) 89
Produced by the méthode champenoise process. Straw gold blend of two-thirds Pinot Noir, one-third Chardonnay with aromas of tangerine. Creamy mouth feel resulting from 100% malolactic fermentation. Apple and pear flavors on the palate with a clean, very dry steely finish. Importer: Maisons Marques & Domaines USA Oakland, CA

Schramsberg Vineyards

Schramsberg Vineyards is one of Napa Valley’s oldest, having been established in 1862. One hundred years later, Jack and Jamie Davies breathed new life into Schramsberg with the avowed aim of making world-class sparkling wine. It was the first Napa winery to produce Blanc de blancs and Blanc de Noirs using traditional French varietals. Schramsberg obtains its fruit from over 80 vineyards in four Northern California counties and ages one-quarter of its still wines in French oak before using méthode champenoise to produce the final products. Schramsberg’s new releases are beautifully crafted sparkling wines displaying stunning fruit, rich textures and overall elegance. The following reviews were reported by us previously. National Distributor: Wilson Daniels Ltd., Napa Valley, CA

Schramsberg 2005 Blanc de Blancs Napa, Mendocino, Sonoma ($35) 91
Blanc de Blancs was Schramsberg’s first bubbly, winning accolades back in 1965 and continuing to the present. This delicious bright, lemon gold wine has a ripe apple nose and a ripe, rich attack. Soft and creamy on the attack with a complex, autolytic character and hazelnut flavors on the rich, flavorful palate.

Schramsberg 2004 Blanc de Noirs Napa, Mendocino, Sonoma ($37) 87
Pale yellow blend of Pinot Noir and a touch of Chardonnay. With a provenance of Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino, the Blanc de Noirs was the first wine of its type produced in America, in 1967. It displays a nose of gardenias and white pepper and has a fine, creamy texture with pleasant, subtle flavors of water crackers, toasted almonds, and tangy lemon. This wine would go well with a substantial fish like salmon or halibut.

Schramsberg 2005 Brut Rose Calistoga ($40) 89
This Brut Rosé is a blend of 62% Pinot Noir and 38% Chardonnay. It is medium salmon in color and displays light red berry fruit and tart cranberry aromas. On the palate it offers semi-fruity red berries in a straightforward format with a dry finish.

Schramsberg 2004 Crémant Demi-sec Napa, Mendocino, Sonoma ($38) 91
Made predominantly from the varietal Flora with a touch of Gewurztraminer, this Crémant is off-dry but definitely not sweet. It’s bright lemon gold in color with a lively bead; aromas of caramel and citrus with a hint of banana on the nose; and offers
a rich, creamy, soft and round attack with honeyed chamomile flavors and a touch of sweetness. Would pair well with crème brulee and fruit tarts.

Schramsberg 2000 J Schram Napa, Mendocino, Sonoma ($90) 94
First released in 1992, this is Schramsberg’s premier Chardonnay based sparkler. Fermented in both oak and stainless steel and aged five years in Diamond Mountain caves, this may be California’s best Champagne-style wine. Deep gold in color with autolytic aromas of caramel, yeast and baguette, the J. Schram has very fine bubbles with rich, ripe apple pie and crème brulee flavors. An exceptional wine that should be paired with exceptional food!

Michigan

L. Malby

Larry Malby of Sutton Bay, Michigan produces creative and distinctive sparkling wines by the method champenoise. He is a sparkling wine enthusiast who counts no less than nine cuvées in his portfolio. Three of these are estate-grown and the others are sourced from neighboring Leelanau Peninsula vineyards. Larry Malby’s cuvées utilize the traditional Champagne grapes of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, but also Vignole, Seyval and Pinot Gris. His wines are nicely crafted. They generally have a generous mousse, are quite creamy, and usually finish dry.

L Mawby NV Blanc de Blancs Cuvee 127 Leelanau Peninsula ($18) 89

L Mawby NV Blanc de Noir Leelanau Peninsula ($18) 90
Gold color with a big mousse and aromas of rich, yeast, caramel and dried apricot. Full, round and creamy on the palate with attractive flavors of yeast, light cherry and almond. In our opinion, this is the best of Larry Mawby’s varied portfolio. A great food wine!

L Mawby NV Crémant Classic Leelanau Peninsula ($22) 87
Medium gold Crémant made of 100% Vignoles. Has a creamy mousse and nutty, rich autolytic aromas. Very nice fruit on the attack and good mouth feel with yeast, fresh bread and dried apricot flavors. Has a nice, round, long flavorful finish.

L Mawby NV Sex Suttons Bay ($15) 87
Pale salmon color with strawberry and light cherry aromas. Creamy and frothy on the palate with light strawberry and cherry fruit. Clean, simple and fun to drink. Enjoy it at your wedding or on your honeymoon, if you dare. Those of an older age might get 4 hours of uncontrollable pleasure from this wine, in which case you should call a doctor.

L Mawby NV Tailsman Leelanau Peninsula ($30) 88
A tasty estate-grown bright yellow gold blend of Vignoles, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Gris. Nose of hazelnut, lees, and toast. Effervescent, crisp, racy attack with nutty, mineral like flavors and very dry lean finish.

L Mawby NV Wet Suttons Bay ($15) 87
Medium straw with a touch of rose petal. Has a frothy mousse with aromas of apple cider and marshmallow cream. Very soft, round mouth feel. Sweet on the palate but finishes dry with lingering creamy flavors. This a fun wine that would pair well with wedding cake.

New York

Wolffer 2004 Brut Sparkling Wine Long Island ($35) 88
Gold with lively beads and a rich mousse and aromas of yeast, dried apricots and toasted almonds. Could pass for a French Champagne. Exhibits a rich, creamy mouth feel. Slightly tart on the nicely balanced palate with rich almond, toast, yeast, and pear flavors. Well done!

New Mexico

Gruet

Gruet is a family winery located 170 miles south of Albuquerque. It was founded in 1984 by Gilbert Gruet of the Champagne house Gruet et Fils and is today managed by his two children, daughter Jacqueline and son Laurent. Gruet vineyards are situated at 4,300 ft and provide grapes for seven different sparkling wines, all made by the méthode champenoise. Gruet produces about 100,000 cases annually of vintage and non-vintage sparklers, and its wines are offered at a fair price. Four of their NV sparklers are reviewed here. Regional Distributor: Michael Skurnik Wines, Syosset, NY
Gruet NV Blanc de Noirs NV New Mexico ($14) 86
Medium straw gold blend made from 75% Pinot Noir and 25% Chardonnay. It has a lovely mousse with dominant yeasty biscuit aromas on the nose. Soft and creamy on the palate with dried apricot and cherry fruit and light acidity. Very dry, crisp finish.

Gruet NV Brut New Mexico ($14) 87
Yellow gold blend of 75% Chardonnay and 25% Pinot Noir. Overtly fruity nose of sweet citrus. Round, full mouth feel of ripe apple with toasty notes. Good balance and a dry finish.

Gruet NV Rosé New Mexico ($14) 87
Medium rose of 100% Pinot Noir. Shows a fine mousse with bright strawberry aromas and pleasant, fresh strawberry and raspberry flavors. Finishes dry and flavorful. Try with your next Sunday brunch.

Gruet NV Demi-Sec NV New Mexico ($14) 88
Medium lemon blend of 50% Chardonnay and 50% Pinot Noir. Very fresh, zesty citrus fruit aromas spring from the glass. Creamy, leesy mouth feel and a palate that is pleasantly off-dry with clean apple, pear and citrus flavors.

Kluge Estate Winery 2004 SP Rosé Albemarle County ($32) 90
Deep salmon color with a fine bead and abundant mousse. Nice nose of cherry with a note of marzipan. Brisk effervescence and a rich, creamy mouth feel with a palate of light strawberry and cherry fruit flavors. Nice dry, crisp tart finish.

Thibaut & Janisson Winery NV Blanc de Chardonnay Monticello ($30) 91
Brilliant lemon color with a refined nose, reminiscent of white Burgundy. Racy mineral laden attack with beautifully delineated flavors of melon and nicely integrated oak on a refined and understated, elegant palate. Made by the master winemaker, Claude Thibaut.

Argentina

Alma Negra 2006 Sparkling Chardonnay Mendoza ($20) 90
Straw gold color with a clean, aromatic nose of ripe melon with a touch of pineapple. Flavors of ripe melon fruit and lovely toasted oak. Full, rich, creamy mouth feel and a lingering finish. The best sparkler we’ve tasted from South America. Importer: Billington Imports, Springfield, VA

Luigi Bosca NV Bohème Brut Nature Mendoza ($50) 89

Luigi Bosca 2004 Extra Brut Mendoza ($25) 87
Medium gold blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Shows a delicate mousse and a pretty nose of leesy aromas and ripe apricot. The palate is full bodied with ripe, rich, round flavors. Moderate acidity and crispness on the finish. Importer: Testa Wines of the World, Oyster Bay, NY

Luigi Bosca NV Finca La Linda Extra Brut Mendoza ($15) 87
A straw gold refreshing blend of 50% Chardonnay and 50% Semillon with a fine frothy mousse and light aromas of apricot and peach fruit. Dry and slightly austere on the palate but quite tasty. Made by the Charmat method. Importer: Testa Wines of the World, Oyster Bay, NY

Virginia

Kluge Estate
Kluge Estate has shown a deep commitment to producing a first-class sparkling wine, and it has succeeded. The winery has recruited some of the best Champagne winemakers in the business starting with Claude Thibaut and most recently Laurent Champs of Vilmart et Cie. Laurent Champs and winemaker Charles Gendro will no doubt take the Kluge Estate sparkling wines to a new level of quality in the coming years.

Kluge Estate Winery 2004 Blanc de Blancs Albemarle County ($27) 91
Lemon gold with sweet, rich creamy Chardonnay fruit, dried apricots and yeast on the nose. Complex, rich palate of pear and crème caramel complemented by very good acidity. Lovely, long finish of fruit and lees.

Kluge Estate Winery 2004 SP Rosé Albemarle County ($32) 90
Deep salmon color with a fine bead and abundant mousse. Nice nose of cherry with a note of marzipan. Brisk effervescence and a rich, creamy mouth feel with a palate of light strawberry and cherry fruit flavors. Nice dry, crisp tart finish.

Thibaut & Janisson Winery NV Blanc de Chardonnay Monticello ($30) 91
Brilliant lemon color with a refined nose, reminiscent of white Burgundy. Racy mineral laden attack with beautifully delineated flavors of melon and nicely integrated oak on a refined and understated, elegant palate. Made by the master winemaker, Claude Thibaut.
Australia and New Zealand

**Australian Premium Wine Connection NV Hill of Content Sparkling Shiraz Pathway ($17) 90**
Dark ruby with aromas of spicy mulled wine and cranberry notes. Very fresh, deep rich flavors of spicy black fruit. The base wine is aged in French oak for 2.5 years. Should go very well with Thanksgiving turkey and all the spicy side dishes.
Importer: USA Wine West, Sausalito, CA

**Bleasdale Vineyards NV The Red Brut Sparkling Shiraz Langhorne Creek ($20) 90**
Medium dark ruby with attractive aromas of blackberry fruit and toasted oak. Fresh, rich palate with round mouth feel and upfront fruit flavors of blackberry with touch of smoke. Finishes sweet and ripe. Has some residual sugar.
Importer: Southern Starz Huntington Beach, CA

**Lengs & Cooter NV Sparkling Red Wine South Australia ($23) 87**
Medium dark ruby with garnet rim blend of 70% Malbec and 30% Shiraz with aromas of spicy plum and a touch of VA. Flavors of red cherry, plum and toasted oak. Slightly sweet on the mid-palate and very dry on the finish. A solid producer, but this wine appeared a little tired.
Importer: The Grateful Palate, Oxnard, CA

**Loose End NV Barossa Sparkling MSM Barossa ($24) 89**
A medium dark ruby blend of 87% Merlot, 11% Shiraz and 2% Mataro produced by the méthode champenoise. Aromas of fresh whole berries, spicy plum. Nicely balanced flavors of creamy vanilla with pure, deep ripe fruit flavors. Finishes dry and long.
Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

**Majella 2005 Sparkling Shiraz Coonawara ($30) 91**
Deep ruby with opaque core showing spicy red fruit aromas. A beautifully balanced, elegant, silky smooth palate of spicy plum with cranberry and vanilla notes. Finishes dry and clean. A real work of art! Importer: The Grateful Palate, Oxnard, CA

**Paringa 2004 Sparkling Shiraz Barossa Valley ($12) 89**
This 100% dark ruby sparkling Shiraz (produced by adding carbonation to the base wine) displays a rich creamy mousse with lovely aromas and flavors of raspberry and plum. It is easy drinking and delicious and a popular Thanksgiving wine. It is also goes well with bacon and eggs, or so the Aussies tell us! Try it. But make sure to drink it cold. Importer: The Grateful Palate, Oxnard, CA

**Primo Estate, NV Joseph Sparkling Red, Adelaide ($65) 92**
This is a well crafted sparkling Shiraz aged on the lees for one year and then blended with old Cabernet Sauvignon wine from the 60s and 70s. It displays a medium ruby color with aromas of spicy black fruit, leather and smoky oak. It offers ripe concentrated black and red fruit flavors with attractive toasted oak and spices. A serious wine with a lovely long finish.
Importer: USA Wine West, Sausalito, CA

**Quartz Reef NV Sparkling Wine Central Otago ($30) 91**
Yellow gold blend of 75% Pinot Noir, 25% Chardonnay aged 26 months on lees. Shows a very fine bead and a complex nose of yeast, toasted almonds, biscuits, and ripe fruit. Excellent acidity and a nice, brisk attack with generous flavors of shortbread, ripe pear. Very long finish with red fruit notes. Produced by the méthode champenoise.
Importer: Vine Street Imports Philadelphia, PA

**R Wines 2004 Punk Bubbles Blanc de Blancs Adelaide Hills ($ Not Available) 89**
This is a new, attractive sparkler produced by Steve George of Ashton Hills working under talented winemaker, Chris Ringland. It is vinified from 100% Chardonnay following the méthode champenoise. It sees no wood and is kept on the lees for 30 months prior to disgorging. Refreshing, bright and spritzy, it offers easy drinking with a lovely creamy mouth feel, very light yeast and citrus flavors, good acidity and a crisp finish. Understated in style.
Importer: The Grateful Palate, Oxnard, CA

**R Wines 2005 Punk Bubbles Rose Sparkling Adelaide Hills ($ Not Available) 88**
The salmon pink Punk Bubbles rosé is 100% Pinot Noir, produced by the method champenoise. It offers light delicate aromas of dried cherry and cranberry. Like the Blanc de Blancs, it is fresh and spritzy with a creamy mouth feel with good acidity and a crisp finish. It is also light, easy-drinking and understated.
Importer: The Grateful Palate, Oxnard, CA
Reilly's NV Sparkling Mad Shiraz Clare Valley ($17) 88
Deep purple ruby showing very fresh, perfumed aromas of plum, violet, with a vanilla note. Clean, youthful and uncomplicated palate of concentrated, ripe red and blue fruit. Provides a nice dry, spicy finish. Importer: Southern Starz Huntington Beach, California

Silverwing Brut NV Australia ($12) 88
Yellow gold blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Exhibits fairly neutral aromas with an elegant palate of light pear and apple fruit. Finishes very dry and long. Very good value! Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville

Trevor Jones NV Sparkling Red Wine South Australia ($18) 90
Medium ruby-garnet with spicy plum and cranberry aromas and toasty oak. Dry attack of nicely delineated plum and cranberry fruit, allmost like a dark rose. This is a very well done, leaner style Sparkling Shiraz. The nice tannic finish can cut through rich foods. Importer: The Grateful Palate, Oxnard, CA

South Africa

Graham Beck

Graham Beck is at the top of a small group of producers making high quality sparkling wine in South Africa today. Graham Beck sparkling wines are made by the méthode champenoise, called the Cap Classique in South Africa. Importer: Country Vintner, Oilville, VA

Graham Beck NV Brut Western Cape ($15) 88
Light gold blend of 54% Chardonnay and 46% Pinot Noir. Complex fresh and aromatic with a floral and toasty nose, showing fresh apple flavors on a creamy palate. Well-balanced with a nice dry finish.

Graham Beck NV Bliss Demi Sec Western Cape ($16) 88
Yellow gold with lovely melon fruit aromas, toast and light petrol notes. Round, creamy, and lightly effervescent on the palate with ripe melon flavors. Finishes soft and off-dry.

Graham Beck 2006 Brut Rosé Western Cape ($19) 89
Medium salmon color, showing a beautiful mousse and a fruit forward nose of light cherry and white flowers. Has a creamy mouth feel and very clean, refreshing palate of light raspberry fruit. Finishes crisp, clean, and long. A lovely Brut Rosé that is a great food wine.

Graham Beck NV Pinotage Sparkling Red Robertson (NA) 89
Made by méthode champenoise. Ruby red with medium effervescence. Very pleasant flavors of red and black berries dusted with cocoa powder. Dry on the palate with a nice lingering finish of dark fruit. This is too serious a wine for the polyglot flavors of American Thanksgiving. Try with grilled springbok or boerewors. Not currently imported to the United States.
The Méthode Champenoise
Annex I

The Press
The first important step in the production of Champagne is pressing the grapes prior to fermentation. Grapes are pressed as whole clusters or bunches and never destemmed. Although Dom Pérignon did not discover Champagne, it is widely believed that he developed the traditional Champagne press, known as a Coquard press. Next to the Coquard press, there are two forms of horizontal press in use: a pneumatic press with an inflatable bladder, and a hydraulic press that has large metal plates. Again, it is essential to avoid the extraction of any phenolics from the skins, seeds and stems. The traditional Coquard press holds one marc, or 8,800 pounds, of grapes. From the marc, only 2,550 liters of juice can be extracted. The first 2,050 liters is the cuvée, the next 500 liters is the première taille, only the cuvée and the premières are now permitted in Champagne. A third press, or the deuxième taille, some 116 liters, is no longer included in Champagne.

Cold Settling (Débourbage)
The juice is allowed to settle for 12 to 48 hours. This allows grape solids, skins and debris to settle at the bottom of the tank, leaving cleaner juice for fermentation. A second débourbage, rather than fining, is preferred by the best producers. Leaving some solids in the juice adds in the development of a fine sparkling mousse.

Production of Base Wine and the First Fermentation
After cold settling, the next step is the creation of a still base wine. Most modern winemakers in Champagne often ferment their base wines in large temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks; traditionally a warm and rapid fermentation (65 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit) is preferred. Warmer fermentations help release aromatic character. Some producers, however, still prefer using oak barrels. These include Krug, Bollinger, Taittinger, Roederer, Gratien and Jacquesson. Regardless, the objective is to create a neutral base, with little varietal character or aroma, moderately low alcohol, and no trace of oak aroma or flavor.

The winemaker must also balance the alcohol content for the base wine with the increases from Chaptalization and secondary fermentation to ensure the final product has an appropriate alcohol level. Most producers put the wine through malolactic conversion, which is a bacterial transformation and not a fermentation. Some notable exceptions include producers such as Bollinger and Krug, who block malolactic conversion. The key is balance, overdoing malolactic results in heavy diacetyl or buttery character and is almost always avoided with Champagne.

Then the winemaker must choose cultured Champagne yeasts for the fermentation of the base wines. There is not much to be gained by relying on ambient yeast when producing the base wine. Again, the key factor is reliable yeasts that create a neutral base wine that is dry, moderate in alcohol and high in acidity.

Champagne producers, particularly the large houses, will ferment as many base wines as possible, keeping lots separate based on grape variety, village and crus. Vintage Champagne is produced with 100 percent of the fruit of that vintage, but non-vintage will involve at least two or more vintages, and often a reserve wine of vintage quality.

Rosé Champagnes can be made by either allowing the wine to stay in contact with the red grape skins for a while (the saignée method), or by adding in a little red still wine to color the cuvée. The term blanc de blancs refers to wines made solely from white grapes (Chardonnay) while blanc de noirs indicates wine from only black grapes (Pinot Noir and Meunier).

Blending (Assemblage)
After several months, all the base wines are brought together to make a special cuvée, or blend. This can involve 30 to 70 base wines. This is one of the most important aspects of the Champagne Method. This is pivotal to the consistency and complexity of many house styles. While lab analysis is important in determining alcohol, acidity, pH and residual sugar, the assemblage is determined by a winemaker’s decisions based on taste. After tasting all base wines, the winemaker determines how they will be used. A blender putting the assemblage together must take into account that the wine will undergo a second fermentation.

In the production of a non-vintage brut, for example, the assemblage involves intricate decisions on the blending of different grape varieties, Écheville des Crus-rated villages, previous vintages, and the inclusion of reserve wines held back from older vintages.

The Second Fermentation and the Liqueur de Tirage
After assemblage, the wine is racked, gently fined and
transferred to a clean tank. It is at this point that the liqueur de tirage is added. This consists of still wine, sugar, yeast nutrients, cultured yeast and clarifying agents such as gelatins, alginates or bentonite. The degree of pressure, or mousse, will be determined by the amount of sugar added.

Most Champagne attains full mousse, or grand mousseux, which is 5 to 6 atmospheres of pressure. For mousseux, the wine need have only 3.5 to 6 atmospheres of pressure. A crémant previously referred to wines at 3.6 atmospheres of pressure. The term was phased out in Champagne in 1994 and was traded to sparkling wine producers elsewhere in France for their stopping use of the term Méthode Champenoise. (Crémant d’Alsace is an example.)

After the liqueur de tirage, the wine is bottled with a crown cap that secures a small plastic pot to catch sediment and dead yeast. The sediment will be removed at a later stage. The wine begins a slow, cool secondary fermentation. The fermentation occurs at 53 degrees Fahrenheit or lower. This requires the use of special yeasts that can perform well in cold conditions. Other desirable traits in the yeast include resistance to pressure, formation of bubbles, tolerance to high acidity, avoidance of foam during fermentation and high flocculation – the separation of solid particles from a liquid in flake form. (This allows the wine to be riddled more easily.)

This slow, cold ferment can take anywhere from two weeks to three months. Many believe the slower the fermentation, the more complex the wine; so the lower the cellar temperature, the better. (Pol Roger has one of the coldest cellars in Champagne). More complex flavors are produced when the second fermentation and autolysis occur slowly.

When fermentation is completed, the Champagne is transferred to racks called pupitres or to gyropalettes for storage. Later it will undergo remuage, or riddling. Some Champagne is sold at this point, or stored horizontally. This wine is called vins sur lattes. Poignéage is nothing more than shaking the sediment from the side of wine stored sur lattes; this can be done by machine or by hand.

**Lees Aging and Yeast Autolysis**
The aging of wine sur lattes, while on its lees, may be the most important and critical step in the Champagne Method. It is during the wine’s time sur lattes and sur point (bottle neck down at an angle) that profound changes begin to occur in Champagne. Lees aging and autolysis is where much of the character and flavor of Champagne is derived.

Autolysis is the enzymatic breakdown of the dead yeast cells trapped in the bottle. Yeast autolysis literally means ‘self digestion’. Autolysis begins to impart flavor and aroma after a matter of 4 to 12 months, but can last 5 years or more. By law, non-vintage Champagne requires 15 months on the lees, vintage Champagne at least 36 months. A prestige cuvée may rest on triage for 5 to 10 years. Many producers age their wines much longer than is required by AOC law.

This enzymatic breakdown of the dead yeast cells results in aromas and flavors of nuts, biscuits, bread dough, toast, acacia, brandy and brioche. It provides for richer mouth feel and complexity. Yeast autolysis is important to the flavor of white Burgundy and California Chardonnay; it plays a dominant role in the flavor of Champagne.

Champagne left sur point, after autolysis is complete, can stay fresh for years, even decades. Older Champagnes, once disgorged, will age quickly. This is why some producers, such as Bollinger, prefer to disgorge their wines upon order and shipment.

**Riddling or Remuage**
The objective of remuage is to draw all the sediment to the neck of the bottle where it can be extracted later. The wine is aged sur point. Removal of the dead yeast and sediment can be done in one of three ways: 1) by hand, called riddling, 2) by machine, or gyropalette, or 3) by a modern technique using small yeast capsules, or pellets called billes, a method that avoids remuage altogether.

Riddling by hand, done by a remueur, involves frequently turning bottles in a pupitre over six to eight weeks. This method was perfected by Madame Veuve Clicquot during the 19th century. An experienced remueur can riddle 30,000 bottles a day. A pupitre holds 60 bottles on each side, at an angle of 45 degrees. Manual riddling is labor intensive and expensive, yet 25 percent of all Champagne is still riddled by hand.

Gyropalettes are machines that were developed by Cava producers in Spain during the 1970s. This is a faster, cheaper, more efficient method than doing it by hand. With specially designed yeasts and riddling agents, a single gyropalette can riddle 500 or more bottles in seven to eight days.
Using billes, or capsules, allows the wine to be riddled in a matter of seconds. It is unknown how widespread the use of this technique is.

**Disgorging (Dégorgement)**

Once *remuage* is complete and the sediment is collected in the plastic pot at the bottom of the bottle, the winemaker removes it. **Dégorgement** is done by immersing the bottle neck in a brine solution and freezing the contents in the neck. The crown cap is then removed and a frozen piece of ice containing the sediment is ejected. This process, and all subsequent steps through the final corking, is done by highly sophisticated machines.

**Liqueur d’Expedition and Dosage**

During *dégorgement* a tiny amount of wine is removed, which needs to be replaced quickly. A mixture of wine and a small amount of cane sugar are injected back into the bottle and the wine is corked. This mixture is called the *liqueur d’expedition*, and the amount of sugar added is called the dosage.

The dosage ultimately determines the style, or grade, of the Champagne. The range of styles created by dosage, from driest to sweetest, includes: Brut Natural, Extra Dry, Brut, Extra Sec, Sec, Demi Sec, and Doux. The main purpose of the dosage is to offset the acidity in the wine. (See Annex II for a breakdown of the different grades.) The younger the wine, the greater the dosage of sugar required to balance the wine’s youthful acidity. What is confusing to many is the fact that these different grades overlap. One producer’s Brut may be another’s Extra Dry.

**Corking**

The corking of Champagne involves placing a metal cap on top of the cork and inserting the cork for half its length into the neck of the bottle. The cork is then pounded so that the top half is too big to slide further into the neck. This creates the mushroom shape of the cork. A wire muzzle, or cage, secures it to the bottle. The bottle is then shaken to homogenize the wine and liqueur.

**Aging**

Once bottled, Champagne continues to age and develop for years, even decades. The better the Champagne, the more desirable these changes will be. The bubbles become creamier and less aggressive, and the liqueur d’expedition and dosage become integrated with the wine, creating floral, honied, toasty notes, with nuances of cocoa, roasted coffee and coconut.

Reaction Maillard is the marrying of the dosage and sugar with the amino acids in the wine. This reaction takes at least three months and can last up to 2 years.

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**Levels of Sweetness**

**Annex II**

The following terms indicate the level of sweetness in sparkling wines.

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<th>French Term</th>
<th>Residual Sugar g/l</th>
<th>Flavor Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brut Nature</td>
<td>(.0-.2)</td>
<td>Bone dry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Brut</td>
<td>(.0-6)</td>
<td>Very Dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brut</td>
<td>(0-15)</td>
<td>Dry or very dry, but fairly fruity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Dry</td>
<td>(12-20)</td>
<td>Off-Dry or Medium-dry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>(17-35)</td>
<td>Medium dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi Sec</td>
<td>(33-50)</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doux</td>
<td>(over 5.0%)</td>
<td>Intensely sweet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When labeling American sparkling wines, producers don't conform to the European standards of dryness, although they do follow the same hierarchy of nomenclature: "Natural" is drier than "Brut", which is drier than "Extra Dry", etc.. The general guide for American sparkling wine is: the cheaper they are, the sweeter they taste.

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**References and Further Reading**

**Annex III**

- [www.effervescents-du-monde.com](http://www.effervescents-du-monde.com)
- [Vintage 1993 No. 26 Newsletter (all about Aussie fizz)](http://vintage.vintageissue.com/)
WINE REPORTS

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