

CUISINE

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**An exclusive look
at his
Culinary
Command Post!**



JOHNSON ON WINE

BY HUGH JOHNSON

Champagne and Company: Sorting Out the Sparklers

The person who comes up with another name for sparkling wine as evocative and snappy as Champagne, without taking in vain the name of a French province and its produce, is my candidate for the next Nobel Peace Prize.

The "Third Countries"

The most determined of the "third countries" to achieve a facsimile of Champagne is Italy. For years the Italians, broke as they claim to be, have challenged the British as the most eager importers of classic Champagne. For decades one perfectionist family business on the road to the Tyrol, Ferrari of Trentino, produced a very good copy indeed, using vines brought from Champagne. But in the last few years the spirit of emulation has swept through northern Italy. A number of firms both in the Alpine foothills and down on the Lombardy plain have produced models of Champagne-style elegance, often buying the grapes (largely Pinot Blanc) at considerable distances to find the quality they need. The most outstanding (though their wines may not be easy to find) are Ferrari (still), Equipe 5 of Trentino, Ca' del Bosco (perhaps the best of all), Berlucchi (perhaps the most notably Cinzano (for their Pinot Nature Atesino), Contratto, and Fontanafredda. These dry, Champagne-style *spumanti* are by no means to be confused with that totally different and altogether more Italian phenomenon, Asti Spumante. Asti comes firmly under the rubric of "other flavors"; its overwhelming sweet-muscat breath makes it one of the easiest wines to fall in love with... and to grow tired of.

