

Vintage

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Buyers Guide

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SPARKLING WINE

Ever since its discovery in Champagne, in the eighteenth century by the Benedictine monk and cellar master, Dom Pérignon, sparkling wine and elegant lifestyles, celebration, and festivity. Sparkling wines were considered celebration wines — used only on festive occasions. Today consumers' attitude have changed towards sparkles and champagne sales have soared. If any one category can be categorized as "goes with everything" wine sparkling wines fits the bill.

Sparkling wines come in a vast diversity of styles and price categories ranging in price from as low as \$2.50 to \$75 a bottle or more. As a rule the quality of a sparkling wine is determined by three factors: size of bubbles, delicacy and finesse, and sweetness. Assertive flavors and sweetness frequently hide wine-making defects. Hence, the dryer a sparkling wine and the more delicate its flavors, the more perfect it must be in terms of balance and cleanliness. This perfection commands a premium price.

A Sparkling wine is no more than a still table wine with carbonation. It is possible to create the bubbles, known as chine, but this is not used for quality products because the resulting product contains large short lasting bubbles akin to soda pop. The hall mark of a quality sparkling wine is miniscule

long-lasting bubbles with a forceful effervescence. The effervescence is created by dissolving carbon dioxide created by secondary fermentation in the sparkling winemaking process. There are three natural ways to create the effervescence. One, called the Charmat process which uses a large pressure tank. The other two processes, (the Transfer process and Methode Champenoise) capture the effervescence in the bottle in which the wine will be sold.

Regardless of the process all sparkling wines, generally known as "Champagne", start with a base wine known as a *cuvée*. It is the quality of this wine that determines the quality of the final product. The care that goes into creating the *cuvée* is crucial to the sparkling taste and style. The wine may be from a single vintage or may be a blend of several years, it may come from a single vineyard or may be a blend of wines from a large array of available stocks. Generally the wine has high acidity and fairly neutral flavors and, as such, would not be considered as very palatable as a table wine. Because of the high acidity and neutral flavor requirements champagne grapes are generally picked before they are fully ripe, with the harvest generally completed weeks before the picking of table wine grapes begins.

In the Charmat process the wines are placed in a huge pressure tank, several thousand gallons or more in capacity

Text by Philip Seldon Tasting Notes by Philip Seldon and Hank Rubin

TASTING NOTES

BRUT

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

NV Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Pinot, Italy, Azienda DOC, Pastine Wine & Spirits, \$19.95 MC Pale gold color; elegant aroma of plums with hints of yeast; delicate fruit yet assertive on the palate, slight trace of oxidation, light body, very good balance, good backbone, moderate finish, gentle mousse, very elegant, bone dry.

NATURE

OUTSTANDING

N.V. Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Pinot Dosage Zero, Italy, Azienda DOC, Pastine Wine & Spirits, Somerville, MA \$19.95 MC Light gold color; open, fresh, elegant, beautiful nose with yeast and vinosity; complex, delicate fruit with nutty overtones on the palate, very clean, light body, excellent balance, bone dry, superb acidity, long, nutty, dry finish, lots of finesse; in the class of a french tête de cuvée, assertive but not overpowering mousse, fine bead, superbly integrated.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

V.N. Piper Heidsieck, Brut Sauvage (sans dosage), France, Champagne, Renfield Importer, \$36.75, MC Very tiny, steady bead; buttery, peach aroma; slight toastiness, oxidation, nose better than taste; clean, slight oxidation, creamy, tart, dry.

RECOMMENDED

N.V. F. Korbel & Bros., Natural, Champagne, California, \$12.00, MC Pale straw color; slow, steady bead; neutral, citrusy nose; creamy, tart, citrusy flavors.

N.V. Laurent Perrier, Ultra Brut, Cuvée Sans Dosage, France, Champagne, Charles Lefrance, San Jose, Ca, Importers, \$26.39, MC Long lasting, small steady bead; clean nose with some yeast; tart, slightly complex, austere, very dry.

ACCEPTABLE

1976 Almaden Vineyards, Grand Cuvée Chardonnay, Nature, \$8.09, TR Straw color; medium bead and mousse; buttery, oxidized but nicely so nose; quite effervescent, dry, bubbly-somewhat overwhelming, simple; warm finish.

1983 Cinzano Pinot Nature, Italy, Julius