

## STYLE / WINE & SPIRITS

### WINE

## Bubbling Over

First-rate sparkling wines from California and Italy are giving French Champagnes a run for the money. By Tom Maresca

Someone should write a book about the necessity of champagne—not just about the pleasure of it on special days but also about the necessity of it on ordinary ones, about how it not only brightens the high spots but also cushions the lows. If I were a doctor, I'd prescribe sparkling wine for the ordinary rubs and crosses of life. I speak from experience here: My wife and I survived eight months of having our apartment renovated around us, and I can assure you that a glass of sparkling wine is unbeatable for stripping coats of old paint from your throat, washing plaster dust from your eyes, and cleansing the odor of burning money from your nose.

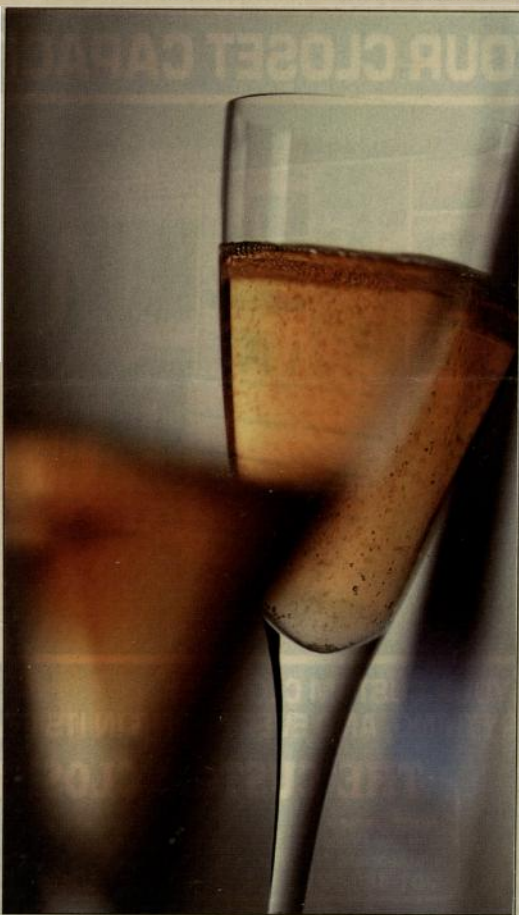
Now that warm days have returned, you can add more sparkle to each sunny day with a glass of champagne. You don't have to wait for special occasions, the June rites of graduation and wedding. The end of a long day on the job is occasion enough to bolster your spirits with a glass of bubbly. Korbel, a major California sparkling-wine maker, has released a study showing that champagne goes with tuna-fish sandwiches, fried chicken, and Oreo cookies as well as or better than it goes with "gourmet" foods, so there goes your last excuse. Just relax and pour yourself a sparkler.

You've got plenty of choices from just about all over the globe. Not too long ago alternatives to Champagne (with the capital C, from the district of the same name in France) were pretty dreadful, and if you weren't ready to plunk down a hefty amount for a bottle of the Real Thing, you might well have forgotten the whole idea.

On the other hand, scrupulously use the term sparkling wine, while prominently blazoning their connection with Champagne in their names: Domaine Chandon, Domaine Mumm, Piper Sonoma.

All the fuss is about the technique that makes champagne champagne—a slow, painstaking, time- and cost-intensive procedure that turns still wines into the bubbly elixir that caused champagne's inventor, the blind Benedictine monk Dom Perignon, to exclaim that he was drinking stars.

Behind that poetic perception lies a lot of hard work, much of it still requiring hand labor. All sparkling wines start out the same, as still wines. In Champagne, there is a more-or-less standard formula for the mixture of the three canonical grape varieties, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier. About 75 percent of the still white base wines comes from



# Ca' del Bosco

*Château St. Jean Blanc de Blancs 1983 Brut.* A pale gold wine of great complexity, with lots of flavor components to keep the palate attentive. Nice citric finish. A wine to enjoy and think about. About \$12.

*Domaine Chandon Napa Brut nv (nonvintage).* Chandon, of Moët et Chandon, brings generations of Champagne experience to the making of sparkling wines, and it shows in the product. Very fine. About \$15.

*Domaine Mumm Cuvée Napa Brut nv.* The French house of Mumm's first bottling from California, and a very promising child it is in the classic, balanced Champagne style. Round, full, and pleasing. About \$14.

*Korbel Natural nv.* The Korbel champagnes have long been American favorites. Natural is the driest of Korbel's wines, medium to light in body, and delicately flavored, with a bright acidity. An excellent aperitif champagne. About \$13.

*Korbel Blanc de Blancs nv.* A surprisingly big and fruity wine for one made only from white grapes. Lots of character. About \$13.

*Korbel Blanc de Noirs nv.* A pretty blush wine with a spine of steel. Somewhat austere in character, but with a strong fruity finish. An elegant wine, lean and fashionable.

### From Italy

*Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Brut nv.* This house may well be the style leader in Italian sparkling wines. It produces nothing but classic champagne-method wines, all of them marked, as this one is, by great elegance and restraint and a sort of reined-in power. About \$23.

*Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Dosage Zero nv.* Beautiful wheaty/toasty aroma and flavor, with hints of peaches or apricots. Lovely long finish. About \$24.

*Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Cremant nv.* A lovely wine, one of my personal favorites, with a distinctive, light, wheaty taste and a fine apricot finish. An excellent aperitif. About \$27.

balanced model and a very high standard of quality. This charmer is no exception. Very fine. About \$16.

*Frescobaldi Brut 1982.* A spicy aroma over a bright, flavorful wine (hints of peach and wheat) with a lively, long finish. Another fine aperitif. About \$12.

*Martini & Rossi Riserva Montelera nv.* An old favorite that is reappearing on these shores after too long an absence. A classic champagne style, with lots of fruit held in balance by a lot of acid. A lovely aperitif. About \$12.