

DEPARTURES

LIFE AT ITS BEST

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VINES & SPIRITS

Tête-à-Tête

Fifteen tête de
to head in a bl

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gnon and Roederer
noisseurs deem just
Clicquot La Grande
also called "têtes de
a product of refine
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spéciales, by cont
best years, which
wards of \$100 a

Setting
Dressing Swell

"ringers") go head

VINES & SPIRITS

Bubble Madness

We convened a group of experienced Cham-
pagne lovers—and \$2,000 worth of Cham-
pagne—at New York's Lutèce restaurant to
conduct a blind tasting of 15 cuvée spéciale
Champagnes plus five "ringers," (noted below
with an asterisk). One

"r" vintage Champagnes in 1983 and 1991,
de Dame, the house's cuvée spéciale, from
wines hike Champagne, already an indul-
luxury stratosphere.

where Champagne started. Once the obscure
northern France, who had struggled to tame

"devil's wine," Champagne

Regency France

nal cuvée spéciale bottling

s first Champagne-fueled

ttle supper" at the country

h of the duke's guests re-

d bottle of a novelty wine,

Champagne historian Pat-

scantly dressed as Bacchan-

end of that supper the suc-

nce was assured."

mpagnes are an American

to about three percent of

account for nearly 14 per-

me consumed in the Unit-

er two million bottles last

ump in 1997 anecdotal evi-

g sales suggests we may be

ew all-time luxury Cham-

end of this holiday season.

ldfire," says Kevin O'Con-

9 *CA' DEL BOSCO SATEN 1992 (\$56.99).
(FRANCIACORTA, ITALY) A blend of
Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco (Pinot
Blanc) from Italy's most highly praised
sparkling-wine producer, the Satèn
(or satin) lives up to its name, with
a subtle mingling of ripe fruitiness
and a dry, elegant, toasty quality.



9 *CA' DEL BOSCO
SATEN 1992

- Louis Roederer's California sparkling wine L'Ermitage (\$35) was solidly preferred over the house's superstar, Cristal (\$150).
- The Bollinger R.D., a connoisseur's favorite, was the subject of constant guessing—various tasters thought they'd spotted it in what turned out to be the Krug and Pol Roger Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill. In the end, the Bollinger was *hors de combat*, a spoiled, flat bottle (it happens even on this level).

In addition to myself, the tasting panel consisted of: Mary Ewing-Mulligan, Master of Wine and director and owner of New York's International Wine Center; Joshua Greene, publisher and editor of *Wine & Spirits Magazine*; Ed McCarthy, co-author with his wife, Mary Ewing-Mulligan, of *Wine for Dummies*; Eberhard Müller, chef-proprietor of Lutèce; Paulette Satur, wine salesperson for New York's Martin Scott Wines; Gary Walther, *Departures*' editor in chief.

Two final words on têtes de cuvée: Shop around. There's a big markup built into these

nor of L.A.'s Coco Pazzo. "Some people at a table start ordering glasses of Champagne, pretty soon everybody's drinking it." In fact, Coco Pazzo's star-studded clientele is drinking \$235 bottles of Cristal so fast, says the proprietor, "we can barely squeeze enough cases from our distributor to keep it in the restaurant."

hear similar stories—particularly about Cristal—from San Francisco to New York to the chic Caribbean island of Saint-John, where, says the manager of the exclusive Cellier Gouverneur winery, so many thirsty Americans blow in on holiday time that "by New Year's Day there isn't a bottle of Cristal left for sale on the island." To which many Champagne drinkers would reply: Fine, if the Cristal is gone, that leaves the rest of the têtes de cuvée for us. Many wine lovers, in fact, direct a kind of insider snobbery against Cristal and its usually famous competitor, Cuvée Dom Pérignon. It's not that they aren't fine wines (I've never seen anyone turn down a glass of either), but rather that they've been taken up by so many wine-ignorant high rollers as a ready-made status symbol.

Andrea Immer, beverage director of New York's Windows