

## Sparkling Wines for New Year's Eve



F. Scott Fitzgerald, once proclaimed, "Too much of anything is bad, but too much Champagne is just right." Let's face it: sparkling wines were made for New Year's Eve. There is nothing quite like wine with bubbles to create a festive atmosphere and elevate the last night of the year to celebratory status.

While only wines made in the Champagne region in France can technically be called Champagne, all wine with bubbles is referred to as Sparkling wine. So whether you are hosting a holiday soiree or need a well-received hostess gift, Sparkling wines make any occasion more festive.

So, just how should you go about finding the right sparkler for your particular palate? Well, price is always a factor, but many consumers often overlook the importance of bubbles. How a wine gets its sparkle can impact both the flavor and the feeling it creates in the mouth. For example, the French use the *Méthode Champenoise* in Champagne. The Italians use the *Charmat* method for their Prosecco. The wines can range from bone-dry to wonderfully sweet. The bubbles can be tiny or effervescent. They can be white, red or rosé. They can be fresh and lively or older and mellower. But it all adds up to a good time whenever a sparkling wine is in the glass.

Here are a few Sparklers from around the world that put the "pop" in popular.

Prosecco is an inexpensive way to enjoy a wonderfully crisp, refreshing sparkling wine that will make your guests feel welcome. The **Non-Vintage La Tordera Prosecco Brunei Brut** from Veneto, Italy is a good value. Scents of lemon/lime fill the bouquet while flavors of apple and nectarine dominate the front of the palate. The crisp, refreshing finish features citrus notes and just a hint of pear and yeast at the very end. **\$20**

The Loire Valley of France is home to the **Non-Vintage Jean-Marc Gilet Vouvray** Sparkling wine. This sparkler is made exclusively from Chenin Blanc, using the *Méthode Champenoise*, and sports fresh scents of white peach and nectarine on the bouquet and bright flavors of citrus, apple and roasted almonds on the delicate and complex body. An underlying sweetness is balanced by excellent acidity that buoy up the notes of mango on the refreshing finish. **\$20**

If you're looking for a classic sparkling wine with a domestic label, the **Non-Vintage J Vineyards Cuvée 20 Brut from the Russian River Valley of California** is a great pick. It sports a wonderful bouquet that is full of toasted brioche, green apple and lemon scents. Tight, compact bubbles carry flavors of ripe apple, citrus and roasted almonds across the entire palate. Great acidity adds a crisp finish and a perfect pairing with oysters on the half shell or shrimp cocktail. **\$20**

I have been a fan of Georgian sparkling wines since a friend introduced me to the Bagrationi winery several years ago. The **Non-Vintage Bagrationi 1882 Reserve Brut** from Tbilisi, Georgia is made from a blend of Chinebuli, Mtsvane and Tsitska, Kakhur and Mtsvane grapes that was harvested and sorted by hand, then produced in the traditional *Méthode Champenoise* (the method used in Champagne). Aromas of ripe apricot and white nectarine combine with well-balanced flavors of apple, pear, peach and apricot that are delivered across the palate by delicate bubbles. **\$26**

Many people consider Jack and Jamie Davies the founders of the high-end American sparkling wine movement. In 1965, after painstakingly restoring the historic Napa Valley Schramsberg winery in St. Helena, they introduced their Blanc de Blanc sparkler. Today, the Schramsberg portfolio includes a variety of sparkling wines, but my favorite is the **Non-Vintage Schramsberg Brut Rosé**. Made from a blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, it displays gorgeous flavors of strawberry and bright cherries on the front of the palate and notes of mango and papaya on the back end, adding delicious depth to the lovely, long finish. **\$38**

Of course, if you want to really splurge, the **Non-Vintage Billecart Salmon Brut Reserve from the Champagne region of France** is a wonderful value in authentic Champagne. Starting with the elegant bouquet of white peach and baked bread on the nose and heading in to the flavors of pear, nectarine and peach on the palate, the wine sparkles and shines. Bright acidity holds up the telltale hints of brioche and vanilla on the crisp finish. A great wine to start or end the evening with. **\$50**