

American Sparklers for the 4th of July



I was recently part of a three-person panel of judges at the 34th San Francisco wine competition. Since there are about 20 panels, you never know what your group will be asked to evaluate. Fortunately, our panel was blessed to begin the second day of judging with an assortment of sparkling wines. Trust me, after four years of participating in this elite competition, there are worse ways to start your day.

After working our way through the first dozen entries, I commented that there were definitely some “keepers” in that flight. So, I thought with the Fourth of July just around the corner, what better way to celebrate the founding of our country than with a few all American Sparklers.

No matter how many times I tell my friends that New Mexico – yes, New Mexico – makes a delicious, value-oriented sparkling wine, I still have to actually pour the **Non-vintage Gruet Blanc de Noir** to convince them. Blanc de Noirs means white from black, so this is a white wine made from pinot noir grapes. Aromas of strawberry and rose petals dominate the nose while flavors of strawberry, ripe apricots and baked bread glide over the tongue on a crisp frame. The bright finish delivers notes of toasty oak and vanilla. **\$15**

The **Non-Vintage Domaine Chandon Limited Brut Classic All American Summer Edition from California**

Is all dressed up of the Fourth of July, sporting a festive red, white and blue bottle, this sparkler is made in the traditional method, or méthode champenoise as its famous Champagne parent, Moët & Chandon, refers to it. The wine is blended with ten to twenty percent Reserve wines from prior harvests in order to produce a consistent “house” style that exhibits aromas of brioche and nectarine and flavors of apple and pear that leads to a soft, dry finish. **\$16**

While Cristal may be the most well-known wine in the Louis Roederer portfolio in France, the

2004 Roederer Estate L'Ermitage Brut Anderson Valley from Sonoma, California is definitely getting a lot of attention here at home. Made from chardonnay and pinot noir, with small amounts of previously vinified reserve wines blended in for consistency, the nose is full of pear (chardonnay) and red apple scents (pinot noir). Flavors of ripe green apples and nectarines mingle with nuances of pineapple, toasted hazelnuts, and honeysuckle. The finish is long and elegant with hints of ripe pear and vanilla notes. **\$40**

The **Non-Vintage Piper Sonoma Rose** is produced from a blend of Sonoma County grapes of 54 percent Chardonnay, 39 percent Pinot Noir, and 7 percent Pinot Meunier. Scents of fresh and fragrant brioche and nectarine, with inviting 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. **\$14**

Since 1987, Argyle Winery has produced world-class methode champenoise Sparkling wine, like the **2010 Argyle Brut from the Willamette Valley in Oregon**. Blended from 55 percent chardonnay and 45 percent pinot noir, this domestic bubbly offers up pretty aromas of apple blossoms, green melon and citrus. Flavors of ripe pear, nectarine and white peach wrapped beautifully around the mineral-laden core up front and end with notes of lemon zest and yeast on the long, fresh finish. **\$27**