

Bubbles for the Holidays



I will never understand why so many wine lovers resist popping the corks on bottles of sparkling wines or Champagne just for the heck of it. After all, most bubbly are incredibly versatile and pair well with a variety of foods, not to mention that they're just swell on their own.

And lest I find myself a hypocrite, even I struggle with reaching for a bit of the bubbly for no good reason, but I am getting better. And now that the holiday season is in full stride, now, more than any other time during the year is a great time to reach for a sparkling wine. Whether you are hosting a holiday soiree, need a well-received hostess gift or just want to start your own tradition of enjoying these wines on their own, go ahead and succumb to the seductive sound of a cork popping from the bottle.

Before diving into specific recommendations, a quick primer on sparkling wines is in order. While just about every wine-growing region on the planet produces some version of sparkling wine, it is helpful to remember that only wines made in the tiny Champagne region in France can be called Champagne (as denoted by the capital "C" in the name). They are produced using the strict **Méthode Champenoise** where the secondary fermentation, responsible for those wonderful bubbles, occurs in the bottle. All other champagne-style wines are referred to as "sparkling wines."

For example, Prosecco sparkling wines, from the Veneto region of Italy, produces some wonderfully crisp, refreshing sparkling wines. These wines are made using the **Charmat Method** where the secondary fermentation occurs in large stainless steel tanks before the wine is bottled. While this may be a less expensive way of getting bubbles in the wine, it actually works quite well with the Prosecco grape because it preserves the fresh, delicate flavors that might be otherwise masked using the traditional Champagne method.

The most popular designation is brut, a dry style that is usually a blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. Blanc de Blancs (white from white) is a wine made solely from chardonnay while a Blanc de Noirs (white from black) is made with pinot noir. Rosés are usually produced using pinot noir grapes whose juice is allowed to stay in contact with the grape skins just long enough to impart a pinkish hue.

Here are four wines that will put a little sparkle in your holiday season. Next week, I'll talk about Champagnes for the New Year!

If you're hosting a party, Prosecco is a great way to enjoy a wonderfully crisp, refreshing sparkling wine that will make your guests feel welcome. The **Non-Vintage Martini & Rossi Prosecco DOC** from Italy is perfectly balanced and aromatic with crisp citrus acidity supporting notes of apple, pear and fresh florals. Invigorating and playful, this newly DOC classified prosecco is beautifully versatile and can be enjoyed on its own or paired with fresh cheeses, grilled vegetables, seafood, sushi and carpaccio is a good value. **\$15**

Add a touch of sweetness to your holiday celebration this year with the **Non-vintage Paul Cheneau Demi Sec Sparkling Cava** from Spain. Made from a blend of indigenous grapes and a touch of Chardonnay, the wine is aged in bottle for two full years before it is released. The fine bubbles carry flavors of ripe stone fruit and red berry notes across the palate while hints of and pastry and toasty brioche add elegance to the sweet-yet-structured finish. **\$14**

I love Rosé wines and Lucien Albrecht is one of the most distinguished and long standing producers of sparkling wines in Alsace, France. Their **Non-vintage Albrecht Crémant d'Alsace Brut Rosé** is made from 100% whole cluster hand-picked Pinot Noir grapes and made in the Champagne "methode traditionnelle." The result is a beautiful wine with a light pink salmon color with flavors of strawberry and wild cherry fruit, with a touch of richness on the mid palate. It is balanced with dry, crisp acidity and complimented with a creamy texture and long finish. **\$21**

For an all-American selection, pop a cork of the **Domain Chandon Non-vintage Reserve Blanc de Blancs from Napa Valley, California**. Domaine Chandon is the California venture of Moët & Chandon, one of the top Champagne houses in France, so they make this 100% chardonnay wine in the *Méthode Champenoise* style (naturally). It offers a combination of intriguing aromas, including honey, baked pear, toasted walnuts and figs. The palate is layered with flavors of citrus, ripe pear, pineapple and baked apple upfront and end with notes of baked bread on the long, fresh finish. **\$35**