

Tasting Monterey

A WINE ENTHUSIAST'S MONTHLY JOURNEY THROUGH MONTEREY'S WINE COUNTRY



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ALL ABOUT THE Bubbles

There just seems to be something special about wine with bubbles in it. Be it at a wedding or on New Year's Eve - opening a bottle of sparkling wine marks a special occasion. Those effervescent bubbles seem to have a way of bringing out smiles, and its reputation of making one "giddy" far quicker than expected is well known (and memories of following day head-aches solidify the tender remembrances).

Perhaps we should begin by defining a few things. First off, a bottle of sparkling wine can technically only be called "champagne" if it is grown and produced in the Champagne region of France, similar to brandy from Cognac or port from Portugal. Therefore, when discussing "the bubbly", we should stick with referring to it as sparkling wine on a generalized basis (this is also a public safety announcement as French regulatory agents take this matter *extremely* seriously). Secondly, a sparkling wine is defined as a wine with significant levels of carbon dioxide within it, which provides the bubbles.

It does make one wonder though how anyone ever perceived that bubbles in wine would be a good thing...I mean can you imagine having your glass of Cabernet Sauvignon fizzing with bubbles? No, no you cannot, which is exactly what people thought centuries ago when they noticed that occasionally their wine bottles had carbonation in them.

You likely recognize the name Dom Perignon and associate him with champagne/sparkling wine. In fact, the Dom Perignon champagne label may arguably be more recognized than any other wine bottle on the planet. And although it is appropriate for Monsieur Perignon to receive credit for promoting quality sparkling wine, he by no means invented the process; his discovery of the positive attributes of carbonation in wine was actually accidental. Perignon was tasked originally with figuring out how to rid the situation from certain bottles occasionally having bubbles in them!



Now, let's get into the vineyards. It may not be surprising that the most common varietal for white sparkling wine production is Chardonnay, but it may be that the second is most likely Pinot Noir. Grapes used for sparkling wine production tend to be best when sourced from cooler growing climates, which explains why the Champagne region, far in the northeast of France, is the ancestral home of sparkling wines (and this is also why our own Monterey County produces some fantastic sparklers as well!).

Sparkling wine grapes are harvested early in order to capture high acidity levels and to avoid high sugar levels; avoiding tannins is another goal. To deter this as much as possible, extra care is taken during the harvest to avoid splitting of the berries, and grapes destined for sparkling wine production are pressed as soon as possible.



Moving on, let's venture into the winemaking process. White wine grapes are the most popular for use in making sparkling wines, and it is even possible for winemakers to make varietal sparklers, such as *blanc de blancs* (white of whites), which is 100% Chardonnay. However, the vast majority of sparkling wines produced are blends of several varietals, vineyards, and vintages - this is why it is not uncommon at all to see non-vintage sparkling wines.

Red wine grapes can be used for white sparkling production (as the juice is initially clear without prolonged exposure to grape skins), and these sparklers are known as *blanc de noirs* (white of blacks). *Rosé* sparkling wines are quite popular, especially in Spain and Portugal. Although rare, there are also red sparklers.

For all sparkling wines, primary fermentation occurs in the winemaking process, just as it does with still wine production. The alteration in the process that distinguishes sparkling production occurs with the introduction of a secondary fermentation (which can occur naturally on its own, explaining why Perignon began experimenting). This secondary fermentation is conducted in various methods explained below, but a by-product is the creation of carbon dioxide captured in the wine. Estimates of the amount of bubbles one bottle of sparkling can produce ranges from 50 to 250 million...that's a lot of bubbles!

As for the different methods to encourage the secondary fermentation, the most well known is the *méthode champenoise*, sometimes referred to as the "traditional" method. In this method, a base blend wine (*cuvée*)

Continued Inside

MONTHLY WINE SELECTIONS

RANCH 32 - 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon



On the west side of the Salinas Valley, directly in the path of Monterey's relentless afternoon winds, sits Ranch 32. This is the place where they planted vines back 1972. Ranch 32 is about highlighting the natural characteristics of the terroir and conveying the taste of place. Each vintage, they produce small lots of wines from these sustainably farmed estate vineyards that represent the best of the appellation. Ranch 32's Cabernet Sauvignon blends fruit from the two AVAs of San Lucas and Hames Valley, located in the southern part of Monterey. Both sites feature porous soils, hot days and cold nights - three ingredients necessary to produce rich, ripe and concentrated Cabernet Sauvignon.

Ranch 32's 2016 vintage shows the potential of Cabernet Sauvignon from the southern, more protected parts of Monterey County. It delivers blackberries, plums and currants with traces of mocha and violet. On the palate, it is deep, lush and fruity with balanced acidity and perfectly integrated tannins. This Cabernet pairs well with grilled steak, barbecued lamb and savory stews.

100% Cabernet Sauvignon

13.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2026

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

CRU - 2016 Unoaked Chardonnay



The 2016 CRU Unoaked Chardonnay was sourced exclusively from marine influenced vineyards throughout Arroyo Seco. These vineyards include Cobblestone (clone 809) and Marks Vineyard (clone CH76). Utilizing various clones and terroirs creates complexity in aroma, flavor and balance to the final blend.

This unoaked Chardonnay is fermented entirely in stainless steel tanks, blocking the malolactic fermentation. The wine was put through a slow, cold fermentation to preserve and trap the floral attributes of sweet mango, honeysuckle and white flowers. Blocking MLF allows the flavors of the grape to shine and promotes the freshness and natural zing that the AVA provides. The flavors of white peach and lychee with notes of honeydew melon and very soft slate makes this the perfect "Day Drinking" wine.

100% Chardonnay

13.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2020

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

CRU - 2014 Montage Pinot Noir (Club Red)



The 2014 CRU Vineyard Montage Pinot Noir was sourced primarily from the marine-influenced Sarmiento Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands. The vineyard is characterized by morning fog and afternoon winds which help to provide an ideal climate for Burgundian varietals. Multiple clones were used in the production of this Pinot Noir including 667, 777, 115 and Pommard 4. By utilizing various clones from multiple elevations, the wine-maker creates depth, complexity in aroma and balance to the final blend.

The final blend was aged in 20% new French Oak barrels composed of Damy and Billon with both medium and medium+ toast levels for 9 months. This aging process creates a nose of freshly picked cherries, cedar and earth. The complexity of multiple clones and elevations shows flavors of blueberry, pomegranate, cranberry and infused tea that is nicely balanced with hints of toasted oak. This showcase wine is a true homage to classic Burgundian Pinot Noirs.

100% Pinot Noir

14.5% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2022

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

SOFIA - 2017 Blanc de Blancs (Club Blanc)



Born from a celebration of love, Sofia wines began as a gift from a father to his daughter. The sparkling wine, as bright and effervescent as the woman who inspired it, is a tribute to the romantic, ebullient spirit of women everywhere. When his daughter was a little girl, Francis Coppola made her a promise that he would someday make a sparkling wine and name it after her. Today, this Blanc de Blancs is one of Coppola's most popular offerings, a favorite for parties and weddings.

Sofia Blanc de Blancs is a delicate sparkling wine perfect for any celebration. This wine offers seductive flavors, fresh aromatics and light effervescence – all packaged with striking, feminine flair.

Fruity and refreshing, Sofia Blanc de Blancs is a rare blend of Pinot Blanc, Muscat, and Riesling. Mellow flavors of apples and pears are topped by a hint of citrus and honeysuckle. Elegant in character, this wine is lightly textured and vibrant through the finish.

70% Pinot Blanc, 15% Riesling, 15% Muscat

12.0% Alcohol

Cellar Through 2022

Comments: _____ ◇ Great ◇ Good ◇ So-So

Cover Article Continued

is bottled with sugar and yeast, with the sugar providing a food source for the yeast, eventually releasing carbon dioxide into the wine. The dead yeast cells (called “lees”) are removed from the wine and *voilà!*

Another method used to produce sparkling wines is the *method charmant*. This method uses stainless steel tanks that are pressurized, which stimulates the process of the yeast and sugar interaction, and then the wine is bottled (i.e. basically it’s a faster process than the previously described method). The last method used is carbon injection, which doesn’t involve a secondary fermentation process, and instead consists of injecting carbon dioxide gas directly into the wine... soda pop comes to mind. As you can imagine, the carbon injection method is used to produce the cheapest bottles of sparklers.



Brut or *Doux*: how sweet do you like your sparkling wines? The amount of sugar introduced for the secondary fermentation process will ultimately determine the level of sweetness in a sparkling wine. *Brut Natural* is the driest, although fairly limited in production. *Extra Brut* is the more common driest style of sparkling wine you will encounter, followed by *Brut*, which is arguably the most popular of all styles. *Extra Dry* (also called Extra Sec) is slightly less dry than *Brut*, followed by *Sec*. The two sweetest styles of sparkling wine are *Demi-Sec* and then *Doux*.

Sweet or dry in style, sparkling wines are produced around the world. California and France are major producers; the Aussies have a Shiraz sparkler; the Spanish produce *Cava*; the Portuguese have *Espumante*; the Germans have *Sekt*; the South Africans produce *Cap Classique*; and the Italians have various versions, with their generic term for sparkling wine being *Spumante*.

So, there you have a brief overview of this intriguing style of wine, and we hope that you will savor your glasses of *bubbly* this holiday season. One last point is that although it may be fun to open a bottle of sparkling wine by “popping” the cork out and projecting a burst of fizz...keep in mind that by doing this you are doing your bottle a great disservice. Not only are you wasting wine (nothing less than a crime on its own), but you’ll be releasing so much carbon dioxide that you will not be able to fully appreciate the bubbling in your glass!

Bryce Ternet - is a contributing editor and is the author of: “*The Stevenson Plan, A Novel of the Monterey Peninsula*”

RECIPE

Holiday Crepes

Ingredients

- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- vegetable oil

Directions

Combine the salt, sugar, eggs, milk, and butter in a blender until well mixed. Add the flour and blend until smooth. Let the batter chill in the refrigerator for at least half an hour. When you’re ready to cook, heat a small amount of vegetable oil in a skillet over medium heat, then blend the batter once more. Drop a few tablespoons of batter in the pan, tilting and rotating the pan to spread the batter uniformly over the bottom. Cook until the underside has slightly browned and bubbles form on the top of the crepe, then flip the crepe and cook until the other side has slightly browned. As you cook them, stack the finished crepes on a warm dish, then, when you’re ready to eat, let everyone fix them to their liking. Makes approximately 20 crepes



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CHEESE

Varietals



EMMENTAL

Emmentaler or Emmental is a yellow, medium-hard cheese that originated in the area around Emmental, Switzerland. It is one of the cheeses of Switzerland, and is sometimes known as Swiss cheese. While the denomination "Emmentaler Switzerland" is protected, "Emmentaler" is not; as such, Emmentaler cheeses of other origins, especially from France and Bavaria, are widely available, and even Finland is an exporter of Emmentaler cheese.

Emmentaler has a savoury, but not very sharp taste. Three types of bacteria are used in the production of Emmentaler: *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacillus*, and *Propionibacterium freudenreichii*. The large holes formed within the cheese are caused by a presence of hay particles which cause gradually larger holes when the cheese is being matured. Historically, the holes were a sign of imperfection, and until modern times, cheese makers would try to avoid them. Emmentaler cheese is used in a variety of dishes, including some types of pizza, and ravioli, where it is often accompanied by prosciutto.















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