

GISMONDI ON WINE

by Anthony Gismondi

Fabulous Fizz

It's a funny thing about sparkling wine, it never gets the respect accorded champagne, although most consumers would have a great deal of trouble distinguishing between the two in a blind tasting. It becomes especially difficult if the sparkling wine is very good, and that happens with more regularity these days.

For the record, champagne is made inside the strictly delimited appellation of the same name with the chalky sub-soil that lies to the east of Paris, while sparkling wine can hail from anywhere.

Over the past 15 years no single wine style has improved more than sparkling wine, especially that group which undergoes its second fermentation in the bottle. The "fermented in this bottle" technique, which bears any number of monikers including méthode champenoise, méthode traditionnelle, and méthode classique, to name but a few, is in fact the same process perfected by the Champenoise to produce the much sought-after tiny bubbles in every bottle of champagne. In fact, in places like Spain, California, Australia, other parts of France, and even BC, leading producers are not only using the same methods to make their bubble as the Champenoise, but in some cases, also the same grapes.

The result is a sophisticated, flavourful, and affordable fizz that is easy to like. Expect to pay anywhere from \$10 to \$30 less per bottle. In fact, there's something for every budget and it's versatile too, no matter what your challenge - brunch, lunch, pre-dinner apéritif or dessert.

Given the quality and selection of bubble one can choose from today, there is no excuse for a couple of token wine list picks that haven't changed in a decade. Here is my top 10 list of bubbles you shouldn't miss.

Oh yes, and don't forget the easiest way to open a bottle of sparkling wine is to hold the cork firmly in one hand and rotate the bottle (not the cork) with your other hand. After that you are on your own.

Chamdeville Blancs de Blancs is a classic French sparkler with a firm underbelly. It boasts green apple skin and flinty flavours with just a hint of nuttiness in the finish. \$12

Seaview Brut has enticing peach, candied apple, citrus, and mineral flavours with a crisp, green apple skin finish. Solid, affordable fizz for large gatherings. \$13

Deinhard Lila Riesling Brut Sekt boasts fine flavour intensity and acidity but is quite austere. If you enjoy riesling, this is for you, or try it as a kir with crème de cassis. \$13

Parés Balt^ Cava Brut is a sophisticated nutty, creamy, fruity bubble with creamy mousse textures. It's made for food in an attractive style for current drinking. \$20

Pierre Sparr Crémant d'Alsace is a very cool sparkler. A blend of 80/20 pinot blanc and pinot noir it has a subtle flavour of minerals and green apples with long creamy textures and a fresh, dry, clean finish. \$24.68

Juvé y Camps Reserva de Familia is a nutty, dried-fruit flavoured fizz from Spain's Penedès region. Rich aromas of lime and melon mesh seamlessly into its firm backbone of acidity and its persistent long, dry finish. Perfect for tapas and other bite-sized foods. \$29

Segura Viudas Reserva Heredad is easily recognized by its hand-blown, oversize bottle and metal coaster base. Although it's not termed a vintage product, it is only made in certain years. Look for earthy, nutty, floral flavours, delicate styling, and super finesse. \$30

Sumac Ridge Pinnacle Méthode Classique is an elegant sparkler with baked pear, floral, creamy, green apple, and nutty, cherry flavours. \$30

Gloria Ferrer Sonoma Brut is a sophisticated bubble blend of 87% pinot noir and 13% chardonnay. I love the pear and floral notes and the toasted almond aromas. The palate is fresh with citrus/apple and toasted flavours. It doesn't get much better than this for the price. \$30

Domaine Chandon Blanc de Noir is a fruit-driven, full-flavoured sparkling wine that is a real crowd pleaser. \$24.95

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