

swizzle BUBBLING OVER Alternatives to Champagne

BY BRENDA MAITLAND

Almost everyone loves Champagne and the excitement of popping a cork. But Champagne can be costly. Fortunately, there are many good Champagne alternatives. To be labeled Champagne, the wine must come from the region of Champagne, but sparkling wines are produced in other regions of France as well as Italy, Spain, the U.S., South Africa and myriad other places. They have different names and characters, and many cost less than \$30.

When comparing labels, note that some identify the grapes used and the method to make the sparkling wine. *Methode traditionnelle* (formerly *methode champenoise*) means there is a second fermentation in the bottle, which gives the wine its bubbles.

There also are terms to identify the amount of sugar in the final iteration of Champagne or sparkling wine. Extra brut, sometimes called brut naturel, means little to no sugar was added during the final step of creating the wine, the dosage. Brut is the most popular sugar level. Extra dry has a higher amount of sugar and is sweeter. Sec contains more sugar than extra dry, and the next level is demi-sec, the next sugar level up. And douze is a sweet wine.

Cremant

Cremant wines are governed by laws that regulate the process and time of storage, but they are made with the methode traditionnelle vinification standards, just like Champagne. Usually, cremants are wines from well-known and established wineries within a region, so consumers can purchase a trusted label even though they are not familiar with the bottling.

Cremants are made in many regions, including Alsace, Loire, Bordeaux, Burgundy and Jura. Prevalent Champagne grapes are pinot noir, Chardonnay and pinot meunier. Other grapes used to make sparkling wines include riesling, pinot blanc, chenin blanc, cabernet Franc and gamay.

Here are locally available cremants.
• Pierre Sparr Cremant d'Alsace Brut Reserve. This sparkler is a blend of 80 percent pinot blanc and 20 percent pinot auxerrois. It offers strong lemon notes and has a solid acid backbone. Find it at Dorignac's, The Wine Seller, Iris and Schiro's Cafe and Bar.

• Calixte Cremant d'Alsace Brut.

A consistent medal winner, this wine is named for Pope Callistus, who was born in Burgundy and served as Archbishop of Vienne. It's a blend of pinot gris, Chardonnay, pinot blanc and pinot auxerrois. The wine exudes heavy yeast and floral notes in the bouquet and a fresh effervescence and long finish. Find it at Swirl Wine Bar & Market.

• JCB No. 21 Cremant de Bour-



gogne. Jean-Charles Boisset is heir to the legendary Boisset wine empire of Vougeot, and his sparkling wines are designated by numerals. This wine comes from the Cote d'Or in Burgundy, and it features golden tones and inviting citrus flavors. It is a good match for cheese and charcuterie boards. Drink it at Patrick's Bar Vin.

• Charles Duret Cremant de Bourgogne Rose. Vincent Sauvestre, a fourth-generation Burgundian whose winemaking family is well-established in Meursault, began this project in 2003. It's a blend of 30 percent Chardonnay and 70 percent pinot noir. Yeasts and a nutty component accent its flavor and it has a balanced, creamy finish. Find it at Martinique Bistro, SoBou, Poeyfarre Market, La Petite Grocery and Revolution.

• Langlois Cremant de Loire Brut Rose. Made in the Loire, this sparkler is all cabernet Franc, and it offers delicate flavors of raspberry and strawberry with nutty, yeasty notes. Find it at Dorignac's, Bouchiro's, Emeril's Delmonico, Emeril's Restaurant and Dijon.

• Marcel Martin Cremant de Loire. This bottling is one of the estate's best and is labeled a "tete du cuvee." It's a blend of 70 percent chenin blanc, 20 percent Chardonnay and 10 percent cabernet Franc. It has a lovely effervescence, crisp acidity and complex flavors. Buy it at Dorignac's and Swirl Wine Bar & Market.

Cava

Spanish sparkling wine made with methode traditionnelle is called cava. When a Spanish sparkling wine is made in the charmat method, it is called vinos espumosos. Almost all cavas are produced in the Penedes area within the Catalonia region, southwest of Barcelona, using macabeo, parellada and xarel-lo grapes.

• Anna de Codorniu Brut and Brut Rose. This winemaking house was founded in 1551, and in 1872, Josep Raventos invented the Spanish sparkling wine cava. Now 26 years on the market, Anna de Codorniu Brut has flavors of apple and pear. Excellent yeast aromas translate to a creamy palate feel. Buy it at Dorignac's.

Carnival – Susie Selby is a fan of New Orleans and Carnival, hence the name for her first sparkling wine. Buy it at Dorignac's and Elio's Wine Warehouse.

• Domaine Carneros Vintage Sparkling Wine. This outpost of the renowned Champagne house Taittinger dates all of its sparkling wines with the year of the harvest. Located in the cooler, southern areas of Napa and Sonoma counties, the ideal growing conditions for pinot noir and Chardonnay are on full display in the glass: balance, creaminess and flavors of lemon, pear, apple and berry fruit. **• Domaine Carneros Rose** is equally impressive. Find both wines at some Rouses, Matassa's Market, Schiro's Bar and Cafe, The Wine Seller, Vieux Carre Wine & Spirits, Dorignac's, Swirl Wine Bar & Market, Lakeview Grocery, Langenstein's in Metairie, Roberts Fresh Market, Martin Wine Cellar and Acquistapace's Covington Supermarket.

• Scharffenberger Brut Rose Excellence. Founded in 1981, this winery is considered one of the premier wine operations in the U.S. Brut Rose Excellence is a salmon-hued blend of 54 percent pinot noir and 46 percent Chardonnay. On the palate, raspberry jam flavor gives way to strawberries and cream. Buy it at Martin Wine Cellar and Dorignac's.

• Mirabelle Brut. From the famous Schramsberg winery, founded in 1862, this popular multi-vintage wine is made from fruit grown in northern California's Anderson Valley, Carneros and the Sonoma and Marin coastal areas. The wine contains up to 20 percent of aged base-wine lots and is aged for two years at the winery. It's a blend of pinot noir and Chardonnay. Find it at Dorignac's, Rouses in Uptown and Acquistapace's Covington Supermarket.

• Roederer Estate Multi-Vintage Brut. This American extension of the classic Champagne house in France places its sparkling wine in barrels to punctuate the pretty fruit with a bit of oak. This blend of Anderson Valley pinot noir and Chardonnay is further blended from the results of several harvests. Buy it at Martin Wine Cellar, Dorignac's and most Rouses.

• J Cuvee 20 and J Brut Rose. These bottlings get beautiful bubbles from grapes grown in the cool climate of Russian River Valley vineyards, and the wines have great style and finesse. Find them at Dorignac's, Elio's Wine Warehouse, Vieux Carre Wine & Spirits, most Rouses, Lakeview Grocery, Hopper's Carte des Vins, The Wine Seller, Martin Wine Cellar, Breaux Mart, W.I.N.O., Robert Fresh Market, Langenstein's, Prytania Liquor Store, Saia's Super Market and Acquistapace's Covington Supermarket.

• Graham Beck Brut NV. South African wineries create sparkling wines with the same methods used in Champagne, and they call the technique "cap classique." Graham Beck produces this brut with pinot noir and Chardonnay grapes, but the two varietals are fermented separately, blended with reserve wines and then rest on the yeast for up to 18 months. This yields lime aromas and flavors and a creamy texture. But it at Rouses in Uptown and Dorignac's. ☞

Metodo Classico, Italy

Italy produces large quantities of sparkling wine known as Prosecco, created in the namesake region from the namesake grape. But other places like the region of Trentino, in the northeast, follow different production methods.

Cantine Ferrari produces an array of Italian sparkling wine styles, and the Ferrari Brut is at the head of the pack. The first vintage was released in 1902 after Giulio Ferrari introduced the wine-making process he had learned in Epernay, France – in the Champagne region. It is made with Chardonnay grapes. The winery also makes a lovely rose from a blend of pinot noir and Chardonnay. Find Ferrari Brut at Swirl Wine Bar & Market, Maximo's, the Ritz-Carlton and Caesar's Restaurant.

Sparkling Wine

The New World labels bubbly wines as sparkling wine. Those wines created in the classic style are designated methode traditionnelle.

• Selby Sonoma County Sparkling

