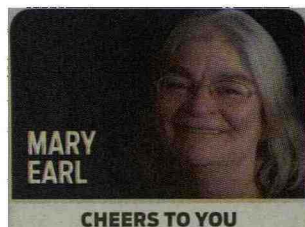


A bit of the bubbly should suffice



If you're celebrating the Year of the Horse with the traditional Jiaozi (or dumpling) recipe that Ann Vogel suggests, nothing says celebrate more than a sparkling wine and the sound of the cork popping.

Bubbly is so festive and they also are one of the most food-friendly wines. They're perfect both for these delicious dumplings and for the midnight toast!

In a perfect world, I much prefer Champagne, either a Veuve Clicquot or a Bolly, but for gatherings of three or more, the more affordable options out there will make you smile and keep your wallet healthy.

For really good, affordable sparkling wine, look for any word on the label starting with a C or a P, with a few exceptions. I'm talking about a Cava from Spain, Crémant from France or a Prosecco from Italy. These

sparkling wines are produced in large quantities from grapes grown in large quantities and therefore are less expensive per ton than the chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes that make up Champagne.

Generally a Spanish Cava is made with Xarello, Macabeo and Parellada grapes. Cavas are fermented in the traditional method, fermented once for alcohol and the second time to produce the bubbles.

Crémant is a term the French use for sparkling wines made anywhere

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in the country but Champagne. So a sparkling wine from Burgundy (chardonnay and Pinot Noir) is a Crémant, a Blanquette de Limoux (mostly the local Mauzac, with a bit of chardonnay and/or chenin blanc) from the Languedoc is a Crémant, the Loire has Crémant (Chenin Blanc) and let's not forget Alsace! (Riesling, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, Auxerrois or chardonnay)

Italy's Proseccos usually are not made in the traditional two fermentations style; instead, the carbonation is added. The result of this less-expensive Charmat method can vary widely. Look for the

Valdobbiadene region on the label. They are allowed to use the Metado Classico or ferment a second time in the bottle.

Here's my list of some old standbys, all \$20 or less:

■ Spain's Cristalino Cava brut is a favorite for around \$6.50 with citrus and green apple fruit, fine bubbles and a clean finish. I have had gallons of this over the years. Very consistent.

■ Riondo Prosecco garnered 90 from a national review. It sells for \$10.

■ Banfi's Rosa Regale, while not a Prosecco, would be perfect for a small gathering at \$16. It's all roses, in the nose, the color and fresh strawberry flavors.

■ **Louis Bouillot Blanc de Blancs Crémant from Burgundy is a blend of chardonnay with wonderful citrus flavors that would pair well with the dumplings.**

■ St. Hillaire Blanquette di Limoux is fresh and fabulous with crisp apple aromas and around \$11.

Xin Nian Kuai Le!

This item originally appeared on Cheers to You, a blog at kitsap-sun.com. To comment or read more, visit <http://pugetsoundblogs.com/cheerstoyou>.

