

OUR ANNUAL **SPARKLING WINE TASTING** RUNS THE GAMUT OF STYLE AND PRICE POINT

by Anthony Dias Blue

SPARKLING WINE IS HOT! People must have a lot to celebrate or—better yet—bubbles have become the accompaniment to more mundane things such as meatloaf on Tuesday. Whatever the reason for this surge in popularity, sparkling wine is booming at every level of the market. Bottles costing from \$13 to \$300 are taking up brief residences in fridges everywhere.

Our annual “Champagne” extravaganza, usually held at December holiday time, was relocated to March this year and thrown open to every level and type of bubbly. The response was a bit daunting, with more than 70 different examples showing up at our offices. But we chilled them all and invited our trade friends to a Monday afternoon omnibus tasting at BOA Steakhouse in West Hollywood, CA.

As you might imagine, it was an upbeat event, but a few of us kept our wits about us and managed to taste and rate the wines. Here they are (in whatever order you choose) just in time for wedding season.

USA

14 Hands NV Brut, Columbia Valley (\$15) 84

14 Hands NV Brut Rosé, Columbia Valley (\$15) 86

The name refers to the height of the wild horses that once roamed the hills of Washington State. Clean wines with a touch of sweetness.

ST. MICHELLE WINE ESTATES

Beaugard 2013 Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs, Bald Mountain Vineyard, Ben Lomond Mountain (\$80) 89

A credible *methode champenoise* sparkler from the only winery in the Ben Lomond Mountain AVA in Santa Cruz County, CA.

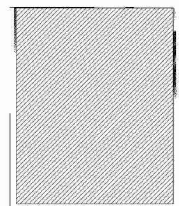
Domaine Ste. Michelle NV Brut Rosé, Columbia Valley (\$13) 86

Domaine Ste. Michelle NV Brut, Columbia Valley (\$13) 85

Domaine Ste. Michelle NV Extra Dry, Columbia Valley (\$13) 85

Chateau Ste. Michelle's sparkling wine label offers value-driven sparklers for any occasion.

ST. MICHELLE WINE ESTATES





Gloria Ferrer NV Blanc de Noirs, Sonoma County (\$22) 88

Gloria Ferrer NV Brut, Sonoma County (\$22) 86

Gloria Ferrer Blanc de Noirs, Sonoma County (\$22) 88

Gloria Ferrer NV Blanc de Blancs, Sonoma County (\$22) 90

Gloria Ferrer NV Brut Rosé, Sonoma County (\$27) 88

Gloria Ferrer 2007 Royal Cuvée, Sonoma County (\$37) 87

Gloria Ferrer 2005 Carneros Cuvée, Carneros (\$75) 88

The Sonoma-based sparkling specialist from Spanish powerhouse Freixenet delivers good values that are surprisingly age-worthy (try cellaring for five or six years). The Carneros Cuvée is lush and complex with burnished fruit

FRUXINET USA

Flying Goat Cellars 2012 Blanc de Blancs, Sierra Madre Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$40) 91

Flying Goat Cellars 2014 Rosé, Solomon Hills Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley (\$42) 90

Flying Goat Cellars 2014 Brut Cuvée, Santa Barbara (\$42) 89

Fiercely independent Santa Barbara vintner Norm Yost produces excellent Pinots and charming sparkling wines. If goats could fly, they'd also be drinking this well-priced stuff.

Frank Family Vineyards 2012 Brut Rosé, Carneros (\$55) 92

Former Disney executive Rich Frank has created one of Napa Valley's most respected wineries. His vibrant rosé sparkler is elegant, complex and long.

Gruet Winery NV Blanc de Blanc Sauvage, America (\$15) 89

A zero dosage bubbly from—yes!—New Mexico. Toasty and dry; fresh and racy with fresh, lively fruit; tangy and bright; long and balanced.

PRECEPT WINE

FRANCE

Bernard Remy NV Champagne Carte Blanche (\$35) 89

A nice price for an off-dry style Champagne that would make a wonderful aperitif.

SHIVER/CK IMPORTS

Bouvet-Ladubay NV Brut Signature, Loire Valley (\$16) 89

Bouvet-Ladubay NV Rosé Excellence, Loire Valley (\$16) 88

Bouvet-Ladubay NV Brut Excellence, Crémant de Loire (\$18) 90

Generous and charming Loire sparklers at a fraction of the price of Champagne.

KOBRAND

Buena Vista NV Brut Champagne La Victoire (\$50) 90

Once again, Jean-Claude Boisset is ahead of the curve with this authentic French Champagne produced under the label of his Sonoma winery. A game changer, and delicious to boot.

BOISSET COLLECTION

Champagne Collet ... see feature story page 117.

Delamotte NV Brut Champagne (\$57) 91

Delamotte NV Blanc de Blancs Brut Champagne (\$76) 93

The unsung sibling of cult house Salon makes under-the-radar Champagnes that are earthy, mineraly and yet entirely elegant. Very worth discovering.

VINEYARD BRANDS

Duval-Leroy NV Brut Rosé Champagne Prestige Premier Cru (\$80) 92

This house is highly regarded in France and deserves more attention here. A beautifully balanced, food-worthy rosé with keen acidity.

TERLATO WINES

Nicolas Feuillatte NV Brut Champagne Réserve (\$36) 90

Nicolas Feuillatte NV Brut Rosé Champagne Réserve (\$53) 89

Nicolas Feuillatte 2006 Brut Champagne Palmes d'Or (\$136) 92

Nicolas Feuillatte 2006 Brut Rosé Champagne Palmes d'Or (\$202) 91

This relatively young house, founded only in 1976, is now owned by a cooperative, which allows it to source from many diverse growers. The attractive wines are constantly improving.

STL MICHELLE WINE ESTATES



Gosset NV Brut Champagne Excellence (\$45) 91

Gosset NV Grand Blanc de Blancs Brut Champagne (\$85) 92

Gosset NV Extra Dry Rosé Champagne Petite Douceur (\$85) 93

Gosset claims to be the oldest Champagne house, dating back to 1584. The exceptional wines are made in a rich, full-bodied style with extended aging.

WILSON DANIELS

Charles Heidsieck NV Brut Champagne Réserve (\$65) 93

Charles Heidsieck NV Brut Rosé Champagne Réserve (\$80) 94

Charles Heidsieck 2005 Vintage Brut Champagne (\$110) 95

Charles Heidsieck 2006 Vintage Rosé Champagne (\$150) 94

Charles Heidsieck 1995 Blanc des Millénaires Champagne (\$250) 95

The original Charles "Champagne Charlie" Heidsieck helped introduce Champagne to the United States in the 19th century. The wines are still outstanding, with layered yet precisely defined flavors and great freshness and vivacity. True wines of celebration and some of my all-time favorites.

FOLIO FINE WINE PARTNERS



JCB NV No.21 Brut Crémant de Bourgogne (\$23) 92

JCB NV No.69 Brut Rosé Crémant de Bourgogne (\$26) 90

Jean-Charles Boisset returns to his Burgundian roots to make this duo of tany and charming crémants with dry, racy style and an irresistible price point.

BOISSET COLLECTION

Lanson NV Brut Champagne Black Label (\$45) 92

Lanson NV Brut Rosé Champagne Rosé Label (\$60) 92

Ripe and elegant from the nose to the finish, these wines beautifully showcase Lanson's "power and finesse" house style, achieved by careful blending.

LANSON INTERNATIONAL AMERICAS



Le Grand Courtâge NV Blanc de Blancs Grand Cuvée, France (\$17) 88

Created by American expat Tawnya Falkner to bring French *joie de vivre* to the American table at an exceptional price point. Mission accomplished!

LE GRAND COURTÂGE

Piper-Heidsieck NV Brut Champagne (\$45) 92

Piper-Heidsieck NV Brut Champagne Rosé Sauvage (\$60) 91

Lush yet tany on the palate, these classic bubbly are still worthy of their first ambassador, Queen Marie-Antoinette, and are always a joy in the glass.

TERLATO WINES

Taittinger NV Brut Champagne La Française (\$60) 93

Taittinger NV Brut Rosé Champagne Cuvée Prestige (\$84) 94

Taittinger 2006 Blanc de Blancs Champagne Comtes de Champagne (\$199) 96

Longtime personal favorites of mine, the sophisticated wines of Taittinger are among the highest expressions of the Champagne-maker's art. Sublime stuff.

KOBRAND



GERMANY

Dr. Loosen NV Dr. L Sparkling Riesling (\$16) 87

Dr. Loosen NV Riesling Sekt Extra Dry (\$25) 87

Maximin Grünhäuser 2013 Riesling Sekt Brut, Rheingau (\$42) 88

Robert Weil 2014 Riesling Sekt Brut, Rheingau (\$50) 88

Smooth and fresh with ripe citrus and bright, sweet fruit, these Germany sparklers put a new twist on Riesling.

LOOSEN BROS. USA

GREECE

Kir-Yianni 2015 Akakies Sparkling Rosé (\$22) 88

Intense pink color; soft, smooth and slightly sweet with lush texture and creamy style; rich and long.

DIAMOND IMPORTERS INC.

ITALY

Ca' del Bosco NV Cuvée Prestige, Franciacorta 92

Ca' del Bosco 2009 Vintage Collection Brut, Franciacorta 92

Ca' del Bosco 2007 Cuvée Annamaria Clementi, Franciacorta 94

The inimitable Maurizio Zanella makes the best sparkling wines in Italy. See the feature story on page 73.

SANTA MARGHERITA USA



Caposaldo NV Brut Prosecco DOC (\$16) 88

Caposaldo NV Sparkling Peach Moscato (\$16) 86

Aromatic and juicy everyday quaffers with with toasty, nutty flavors.

KOBRAND

Rotari 2013 Brut Trento DOC (\$20) 90

The stylish sparkling wines from Italy's Trento DOC are well worth stocking up on. Super value for the price, with creamy texture and bright, mouthfilling flavors.

PRESTIGE WINE IMPORTS



Voveti NV Prosecco DOC (\$17) 87

The Prosecco project of Spain's Ferrer family. Smooth and dry with clean, balanced flavors.

FREIXENET USA

AUSTRALIA

Jansz NV Premium Cuvée, Tasmania (\$27) 90

Jansz NV Premium Rosé, Tasmania (\$27) 90

The "Méthode Tasmanoise" producer does a fantastic job with its Down Under sparklers. Great values that deliver the goods and hold their own with the French stuff. sj

NEGOCIANTS USA

