

The Sweet Sommelier

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2015

Sonoma's Turn to Sparkle and Shine!

Oh what a difference a week makes.

Last weekend, I was sitting, basking in the sun as it blazed down on my patio. The temperatures were in the 90s, and I needed shade to enjoy time outside. However, my realization that this sunshine must be savored and soaked up in all its glory seemed almost desperate as I sat sipping on and writing about Napa's sparkling wines.

I was all too correct.

This weekend, temps are in the 50s...for the high...during the peak of the day. Nights have been in the 30s.

Yes, sometimes just a short time makes a considerable difference.

The same can be said for a short distance.

Though Napa County and Sonoma County are separated merely by a virtual line, visits to the two vary greatly. Grapes that prosper, atmospheres of tasting rooms, and philosophies in wine are quite different.

One such difference seen between these close neighbors is their sparkling wines. Where Napa generally has sparkling houses that focus primarily on that style of wine and make little else, Sonoma's diverse character shows through the many producers that make sparklers as just a minute part of a wider portfolio of wine.

Sonoma bubbles are truly special, maybe even more so because they are often one small share of a varied wine list. Yes, Sonoma has producers who specialize in sparklers (think Korbel and Gloria Ferrer), but the possibility of finding a bubbly on the list at even a small producer is likely...and lovely!

Buena Vista

Historically important to Sonoma, Buena Vista actually started by producing large quantities of sparkling wine in the late 1800s. Hungarian Agoston Harazsthy was in the process of building a Sonoma wine empire when he purchased land to grow vineyards and built an impressive production facility, including caves for aging sparkling. He entrusted his son Arpad to produce traditional method sparkling wines from California grapes.

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Obviously Buena Vista has been through numerous changes in the over 100 years since this incident. One is that excellent sparkling wines are consistently produced and enjoyed by consumers. Myself included.



Historically important and incredibly impressive press house as tasting room.

Wine of Note:

La Victoire Brut Rosé—Served in a more traditional style bottle, Buena Vista considers this a tribute to Arpad and his sparkling wines from the past. A rich smell and taste of ripe red cherries comes through with a hint of almond cookie on the finish. Pair with fresh strawberries for a special (and maybe romantic) treat.



Another great example of a brute rose.

As I wrap up in a warm blanket today after sweating in the sun last weekend, I'm reminded what a difference a week can make. I am also well aware what a difference just a few miles can make, especially when it comes to wine. So close in proximity, yet often so far in terms of style, Napa and Sonoma make some absolutely amazing sparkling wines. However, Napa sparkling producers usually specialize in just sparklings and do few still wines.

Just a hop, skip, and a jump away in Sonoma, many producers have a much more diverse array of wines on the tasting menus. Some, like Gloria Ferrer, may specialize in bubbles, but still produce multiple still options. Others illustrate the varied style for which Sonoma is known, producing mostly quality still sippers, but then showcasing one or two sparkling options.

Those that embrace this change of pace are making some very special bottles of bubbles. So special that wine lovers need to embrace the contrasts of these two regions and drink the bubbles of both!