

Real Champs

Is it just sparkling wine, or is it—ooh-la-la—Champagne?

BY JAMES KNIGHT

'Let them drink Champagne.' Is that what some North Bay wineries are saying by importing French bubbly? Is there no more locally made sparkling wine on hand?

Before we storm the battlements and lob magnums of Sonoma Coast Blanc de Noirs at this elitist coterie, let's back up and explain what we talk about when we talk about Champagne. While better quality California sparkling wine is made in the traditional Champagne method, "Champagne" is legally defined as coming from a specific region of France. Guess the name of that region—you got it, *frère*. Confusingly, a new trend finds local wineries importing and selling actual Champagne. We asked a few for samples—and their excuses.

Buena Vista La Victoire Champagne (\$50) What gives, after Jean-Charles Boisset expensively retrofitted the historic 1864 Champagne cellar at

Buena Vista? Boisset calls this wine an "ambassador of the Franco-American relationship" in honor of Arpad Haraszthy's efforts to make California's first traditional method sparkling after interning in Épernay.

Let the roiling, gold-green tinted bubbles settle before tilting the glass noseward to find classic brut aromas of dry straw and slightly musty lees. My favorite for its contrasting lemony zip on the finish, this wine can be bought retail; a \$75 version is offered at the tasting room. ★★★★★