

FOR THE LOVE OF BUBBLES

BY LAURA NESS

Is there anything more blushing romantic than a bottle of sparkling Rosé? Well, yes, a bottle of Blanc de Blanc, Brut or Blanc de Noir can set our hearts aflutter just as easily. But, for the sheer beauty of watching a bevy of bubbles chasing each other through a stem, flute or bowl, pink adds a certain visual appeal that sets the tone for a proper Valentine's Day love fest. We're in love with all of these bubbles, and salute those who insist on making exemplary méthode champenoise.

Bottle Photos: Mockingbird Studio



CARACCIOLI CELLARS

2012 BRUT CUVEÉ,
SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS

Made by the late French Champagne master Michel Salgues, this is 60 percent Pinot Noir and 40 percent Chardonnay, sourced from Talbott and Hahn, whose vineyards along River Road in the Santa Lucia Highlands are legendary for their balance and perfect acid. Picked by hand in small totes in August of 2012, the lots were lightly pressed to preserve freshness, with 60 percent completing fermentation in stainless steel, and the other 40 percent in neutral French Oak. There is nothing of the wood except the texture to be found in this straw-colored sparkler that delivers ripe Meyer lemon, tangerine skin and mandarin oil on the nose. The bubbles dance energetically throughout the persistent mousse, delivering oodles of Granny Smith apples, Meyer lemon curd and a distinctive marmalade of citrus fruit throughout. A saline quality endears itself to lovers of fresh oysters, and crab cakes would be a fine companion.

12% | \$52



DELOACH VINEYARDS

2015 LE ROYAL BLANC DE NOIR,
HEINTZ VINEYARD, GREEN VALLEY

From a single vineyard at the western edge of the Russian River Valley comes this boldly satisfying sparkler made entirely of Pinot Noir. The singularly Jean-Charles Boisset bling on the label makes a striking impression even before you uncork the utter deliciousness inside. This is the first sparkling ever made by DeLoach, and it marks the 40th anniversary of the winery. Winemaker Brian Maloney loves what the two clones of Pinot bring to the bubbly party: clone 113 brings perfumed aromatics and elegance, while the Beringer clone, one of the first clones of Pinot Noir planted in the U.S., brings depth and grace. The perfume is remarkable, leaning to freesia and lilac, and generous flavors of strawberry, raspberry and bruléed peach build to an explosive crescendo on the fashionably fine-bubbled mid-palate. Fittingly, the long-lasting finish is pure French sophistication. *Magnifique!*

12.5% | \$75



DOMAINE CARNEROS

2013 LATE DISGORGED ROSÉ,
NAPA VALLEY

Fabulously pink in its dawn patrol livery, this is one of the best of the entire lot. In order to bear a vintage, a sparkling wine must be aged in the bottle for three years, so this debutante is a bit fashionably late to the party. But, its five years aging *sur lie en bouteille* has delivered a quintessential example of the highly acclaimed Domaine Carneros style. It was made by longtime founding winemaker Eileen Crane, who built the facility in the style of a French Champagne house at the behest of the Taittinger family. Heady, persistent tiny bubbles retain their dominance throughout this wine's magnificent presence. High-level perfume, strawberry jam, lavender, orange zest, apricot, white peach and toasted brioche are the hallmarks of this vivacious sparkling. Few domestic sparklings attain the depth of French champagne, but this one comes close—an assertively, worthwhile choice for any occasion.

12% | \$56



FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS

2014 BRUT ROSÉ, CARNEROS

The purity of this sparkler made from 88 percent Pinot Noir and 12 percent Chardonnay shines through its bottle, naked but for a few embellishments on its clear label. This is totally méthode champenoise, where the wine rested on the spent yeast cells for two and a half years before disgorgement. Linear, firm and classic, this salmon pink lovely makes you want to watch *Holiday Inn* and fast-forward to the part where Fred Astaire and Marjorie Reynolds crash through the giant paper heart. It's like drinking the essence of summer in the dead of winter, with its cheery red cherry pie flavors melded with fresh strawberry shortcake, topped with a finish of orange peel. The abundance of finessed fruit flavors on the nose and on the palate are framed by toasty, creamy nuances.

12% | \$55