

Sparkly Decade

All you need for a bubbly trip through the years **BY JAMES KNIGHT**

When the new year lurches closer every day with, so to speak, calendar-like regularity, *Bohemian* staffers assemble for a rigorous evaluation of blind-tasted sparkling wines. The rigor is all mine—wrangling bottles and keeping flutes filled while trying to take my own tasting notes amid increasingly merry company.

This year, it's all about the vintage. Producers of méthode champenoise sparkling wine often reserve the best lots for a bottling that's labeled with that vintage date. Compare to non-vintage blends, which are aimed at consistency—think Gloria Ferrer Sonoma Brut. You can't go wrong with that wine, as it's about reliability, not the vagaries of a particular vintage.

It's a nice way to recall years past while toasting the new. As we process 2016, and deal with 2017, the wines from these years will also mellow. Someday, we may even make it past 2020 and toast with a sparkling wine of that vintage and say, "It was a very good year."

Iron Horse 2005 Joy! Green Valley of Russian River Valley Sparkling Wine (\$275) Funny thing about time: one day you run into an acquaintance you'd always thought of as somewhat older than yourself, and at some point, after you've eclipsed the age they were when you first met them—if you're following me—all of

a sudden you notice how youthful they look for their age—radiant, even. That's what this wine is like. Going on a decade and a half is long in the tooth for many a white wine, but this vibrant, green-tinted sparkler will please fresh fruit fans and old yeasty fans alike with hints of orange blossom honey, pecan and marzipan, and while it's still got enough scoury energy to clean every corner of the palate, Bohos found it smooth and balanced. Bottled in magnums only. ★★★★★

Schramsberg 2009 J. Schram North Coast Sparkling Wine (\$120) Sporting sourdough-bread and bear-claw-frosting aromas, this tête de cuvée tingles the tongue with a sweet note of golden raisin. Toast to your health—the Affordable Care Act passed in 2009. ★★★

Iron Horse 2010 Brut LD (\$110) This late-disgorged brut barrels across the palate, with a scant half percent of residual sugar to slow it down. Yet it's complex and balanced, evoking mushrooms in cream, bourbon vanilla and maybe even horse barn, in a good way. Partygoers will wake up and take notice of this beauty. In 2010, a bunch of Americans woke up to the fact they had to pay taxes. ★★★★★

Mumm Napa 2011 DVX Napa Valley Sparkling Wine (\$70) The DVX got its certificate of live birth in a cool year that was better suited to sparkling styles than sun-loving Napa Cabernet. Light and limpid, this got mixed Boho reviews from "pucker-worthy" to "creamy" or "musty." ★★★

Breathless 2012 Sonoma County Brut (\$54) Join the wine

club and pick up the very first vintage-dated bubbly from the Breathless team. Lemony lees, grapefruit rind and starfruit are some of our favorite things about this zippy brut from 2012, when wineries recorded a big grape crush, and Mitt Romney had binders full of women. ★★★

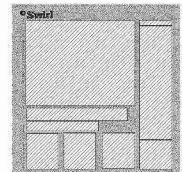
Korbel 2014 Le Premier Russian River Valley Champagne (\$30) Some say hay, others say

pine nut—this light gold wine also makes me think of buttered croissant, artichoke leaf, rosemary and the resinous Korbel Natural. The North Bay's SMART train was originally scheduled to begin service in 2014—sorry, did you just snort sparkling wine out your nose? ★★★

Iron Horse 2014 Wedding Cuvée (\$45) With a peachy, light tea rose color to the eye, and sea shells and strawberries in cream meeting the lips, this iconic West County sparkler wins friends fast. Does it finish on the sweet, or tangy, side? Love it either way. Celebs Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie tied the knot in 2014—commemorate their separation when the 2016 arrives. ★★★

Schramsberg 2014 Blanc de Noirs North Coast Brut (\$43) Light yellow with tiny bubbles and tangy, yellow pear fruit, this better reveals a rich hint of butter cookie in a tulip-shaped wine glass—though it doesn't have the same clinkety-clink appeal as a flute. Readers may recall the *Bohemian's* in-depth coverage of the mustard question in January 2014. ★★★

DeLoach 2015 Le Royal Blanc de Noir Green Valley of Russian



River Valley (\$75) Like Napoleon, this spunky sparkler crowns itself—it wears a shiny crown ornament instead of a common paper label, as it should, coming from one of those vineyards that might be called Russian River royalty. Lean and tangy, full of fancy: is that salty spray from a sea of lemonade? Toasted lemon blossom and raisined grapefruits? ★★★★★
Korbel 2015 Blanc de Noirs Sonoma County Champagne

(\$30) The multi-year drought continued to dwindle the North Coast grape crush in 2015, but this assertive, salmon-pink bubbly is so modestly priced, for a reserve wine of just 1,000 cases made, you can easily irrigate a small crowd—but you have to go to the tasting room or website to find it. Crème fraîche and nectarine notes pleased the Boho crowd, anyway. What's that, the drought is back? Drink up! ★★★★★ **B**



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