

A SALUTE TO THE FLUTE

Why the much-maligned Champagne stem is the perfect vessel for sparkling wine.

AS an ardent defender of the Champagne flute, these are tough times. The headlines proclaim, “The Tragic Flute: Why You’re Drinking Champagne All Wrong.” Sommeliers sneer and say, “Flutes? We’re adults. We use real wine glasses.”

Waiving the flag for flutes has brought me notoriety. Whenever an anti-flute missive is published, friends love to tag me and rub it in my face. Most recently? “You don’t use flutes,” says Maggie Henriquez, president and CEO of Krug. “You see, using a flute is like going to a concert with ear plugs.”

Et tu, Krug?

Well, I’m doubling down. The flute is the ideal glass for Champagne, and I’ve called in a couple experts to help make the case.

While flute haters concede that its shape is ideal for bubble promotion, their main gripe is it “stifles” Champagne’s scent. You should swirl the wine to release its bouquet, like a fine still wine.

Curious, I contacted Avery Gilbert, author of the book *What the Nose Knows: The Science of Scent in Everyday Life*. He pointed to a research paper published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2009.

“The basic idea is that aroma molecules in Champagne are actively carried to the surface by the bubbles,” says Gilbert. “The bursting bubbles release aroma-enriched aerosol. My take is that for the best aroma perception, you’d want to maximize the bubble flux through an air column with a cross-section similar to that of

the nostrils. So I’d go with flute over tulip, and hands down over coupe.”

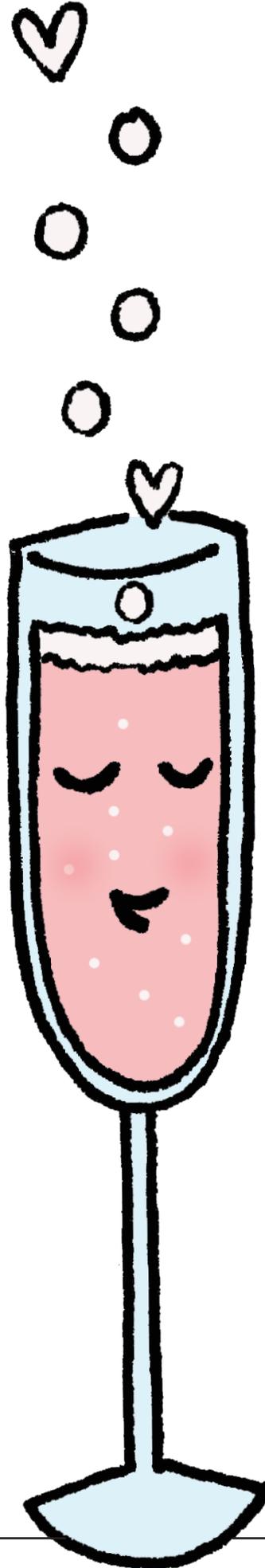
Next up on my list of bubbly scholars was David Gire, assistant professor at the University of Washington’s psychology department, who analyzed wine-specific olfaction literature that covers linguistics, psychology and sensory neuroscience.

He believes that “the everyday magic of multisensory integration” and the work of the trigeminal nerve, which is separate from our sense of smell and ferries sensations from our face to our brain, overcome the limited headspace of a flute. Basically, the visual spectacle is key.

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“[V]ision accounts for a large portion of our perception of flavor—just try eating a steak that has artificially been colored green,” says Gire. “The iconic appearance of Champagne [is] in a flute, which will tend to reignite our memories of celebrations past. It is not just that these factors compensate for reduced smell, but rather that they can make the smell and taste of the Champagne better.”

Is there one right glass for a wine? That’s up for discussion, but surely there’s nothing wrong with the Champagne flute. It will remain in my head, and my heart, as the preeminent pleasure-giver. After all, it’s not really about swirling and sniffing, just drinking and enjoying.



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You’ll find Senior Digital Editor **Jameson Fink** drinking Champagne all over New York City, even reluctantly from tulip-shaped wine glasses.