



Seasonal Traditions

Choosing Champagne©

by Emma Balter

It is a well-known fact that you cannot ring in a new year successfully without drinking some bubbles. Here's your guide to popping bottles this December 31st.

First, let's start off with some basics. The term "Champagne" is commonly used for all types of sparkling wine, but this is not quite accurate. Champagne is a sparkling wine that comes specifically from the region in northern France of the same name. It is where the *crème de la crème* of sparklers is produced, and typically the most expensive. It is not impossible to find reasonably good value in Champagne, however; look for lower end cuvées from producers such as Heidsieck, Jacquart, and Lanson.

Great sparkling wine is produced all over the world. If you want to stick with French, pick up a bottle of Crémant de Loire or Crémant du Jura, which both offer crisp flavors and vibrant acidity. If you like a little more sweetness, Prosecco from northeastern Italy is always a reliable crowd pleaser. Just a stone's throw away, Franciacorta makes wines that are richer in texture, made in the similar traditional method as Champagne, and at a more accessible price point. Your Anglo-Saxon friends also make standout sparklers. Look for bottles from California, such as Roederer Estate, Domaine Carneros and Domaine Chandon.

Something to keep in mind when shopping for sparkling wine is sweetness levels. "Brut" is dry –universally the most popular style, and what you will find the most of in retail stores. If you would like something drier, look out for "Extra Brut" or "Brut Nature" bottlings. Paradoxically, a Champagne labeled "Sec" will actually have a fair amount of residual sugar. Explore these styles, and ask your retailer for help if you have any doubts.

I will leave you with one more pearl of wisdom: Although it is traditional to serve sparkling wine in a flute for aesthetic reasons, try mixing it up this year and use white wine glasses – the aromas in the glass will release themselves much more readily! Trust me, you will never go back.

Wishing you a very happy new year full of happiness, success, and bubbles!