

Decanter

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MAY 2023

INTO THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN WINE



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CHAMPAGNE'S
ARTISAN GROWERS

Tasted & Rated!

BAROSSA SHIRAZ
CHILEAN SAUVIGNON BLANC

295

WINES TASTED
IN THIS ISSUE

★ 30 GREAT US CHARDONNAYS ★ WASHINGTON'S TREMENDOUS TROTHE
★ HEROES OF WINE'S CULTURE CLASH ★ TABLAS CREEK: AMERICA'S OWN RHÔNE
★ THE SOUTHERN CHARM OF CHARLESTON ★ THE BEST US SPARKLING WINES



FUTURE

AMERICA'S SPARKLING FUTURE

A tasting of more than 50 sparkling wines from across the US, from Washington state all the way to Virginia, produced 18 top picks that show there's much more yet to discover in America's best fizz

WORDS & SELECTION J'NAI GAITHER

The USA has come a long way in wine production and reputation. Though we can date the country's history with wine back to the 1800s, it was only in the late 20th century that the US began to be recognised for quality wine production. The popular pink 'white Zinfandel' and its arrested fermentation notwithstanding, the Judgement of Paris tasting of 1976 and the subsequent investment by some of the great family domaines of Europe (Drouhin, Roederer, Taittinger) cemented the country's reputation in European circles as a respectable winemaking region.

New World wine regions such as the US have often endured a bad rap with European critics, who might find that the wines are either too oaky, too fruity, too alcoholic – or just too American? But sparkling wines have been the outlier, with experts consistently extolling their virtues, as reflected in their ratings. Of course, it's hard not to compare domestic US sparkling wines with Champagne, the standard-bearer against which all secondary-fermentation wines are stacked.

In the domestic market, American sparkling wines have primarily been driven by a 'value-first' approach, and consumers have been pleasantly surprised – often elated – at what they get inside the bottle. As US producers have continued to hone their sparkling production and specialise in limited or vineyard-specific

'The sheer variety of styles of sparkling wine in the US is a boon'



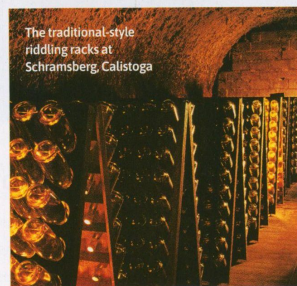
Veritas sits on the slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Monticello, Virginia

bottlings, American consumers' appetites for more premium-priced sparkling wines have followed along.

FREE TO EXPLORE

The sheer variety of styles of sparkling wine in the US is a boon. The traditional 'méthode champenoise' [a second fermentation inside the sealed bottle via the addition of yeasts] was once the go-to technique for sparkling wine. But now we can find a range of styles, including pétillant naturel, Charmat and transfer methods. The US can experiment with these styles – and even experiment with various grape varieties – because it is unencumbered by the stringent regulations that limit some European countries.

The following parade of American bubbles shows two things: that even the



The traditional-style riddling racks at Schramsberg, Calistoga

unlikely places deserve a second look; and that we're just scratching the surface of the potential of US-produced bubbly. With a changing climate, increases in knowledge and skills acquired from across regions and a newfound respect for what's possible for bubbles in the US, the future appears to be sparkling.

Joseph Phelps, Ovation Brut, Sonoma Coast, California 2017

US\$125 josephphelps.com
Ageing for 46 months before disgorgement is a serious commitment for just the second vintage of this sparkling wine, which comes from the Freestone Vineyards estates. Applause is justified: from its rich, yeasty, autolytic flavours to tart Granny Smith apples, there's a lot to love. A lovely gold-green hue and bright aromatics round it out. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alcohol** 12.8%



97

Schramsberg, J Schram Noirs Brut, North Coast, California 2013

US\$130 schramsberg.com
This rose-gold blanc de noirs beauty glistens in the glass. A burst of bruised red apple skin and red fruits hits your olfactory senses like a freight train... and that's all before you even taste it. Maraschino cherry syrup, ripe strawberries and pomegranate on the palate showcase quiet maturity and confidence. Drink now or save for years to come. **Drink** 2023-2033 **Alc** 12.9%



96

Frank Family Vineyards, Lady Edythe Reserve Brut, Carneros, Napa Valley, California 2012

US\$110 frankfamilyvineyards.com
Stately and elegant, with unrelenting acidity yet a softly perfumed edge. This may be due to its bottle age – disgorged after eight years on its lees, and heading for its 11th year – but it's also a sign of meticulous vineyard and winery practices. 61% Chardonnay and 39% Pinot Noir, still showing remarkable freshness. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 12%



95

Inman Family, Luxe Cuvéé Extra Brut, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County, California 2015

US\$90 inmanfamilywines.com
This is Inman's first sparkling wine that is not 100% estate Pinot Noir, here including 28% Chardonnay from Irwin Lane Vineyard. With kiwi, banana and pineapple notes on the nose, it leapfrogs out of the glass before settling on the palate with fervour. After a while, the finish pops by to say 'hi', introducing a soft, round carob note to the party. **Drink** 2023-2028 **Alc** 13%



94

Veritas Scintilla, Monticello, Virginia 2015

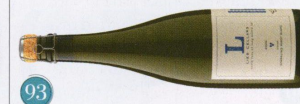
US\$60 veritaswines.com
A sparkling 100% Chardonnay from a former horse farm in Monticello, planted to vineyards in 1999. A whiff of white flowers with a hint of maize and buttered popcorn makes way for a mouthful of lemon drops and green apples surrounding a flinty mineral core. A lovely option for both a special occasion or a quiet evening at home. **Drink** 2023-2028 **Alc** 11.9%



94

Lieb Cellars, Estate Sparkling Pinot Blanc, North Fork of Long Island, New York 2020

liebandco.com
Sparkling wine may be a real sweet spot for the growing conditions on Long Island, given the early autumn frosts. Practically clear in colour, this uses one of the rarer of the original seven permissible Champagne varieties, Pinot Blanc. With passion fruit and kiwi aromas, and vanilla cream with hints of pineapple or piña colada, it's a great sipper. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 12.2%



93

Roederer Estate, Quartet Brut, Anderson Valley, Mendocino County, California NV

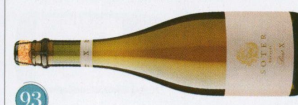
£26-£34 Widely available via UK agent Maisons Marques et Domaines
Roederer Estate's multi-vintage sparkler, Quartet Brut (also known as Roederer Brut in the US) tastes like candied pineapples and cream. There's a touch of stone fruits and a healthy dose of salinity. The dosage of 9-10g/L is towards the upper end of the brut category, but it feels well integrated and balanced. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 12.5%



93

Soter Vineyards, Estates Brut X, Yamhill-Carlton, Willamette Valley, Oregon NV

sotervineyards.com
Soter's first non-vintage sparkling wine (70% Pinot Noir and 30% Chardonnay from the Mineral Springs Vineyard) combines 40% reserve vintages and 60% from the 2017 vintage. You'll first notice its glowing gold hue, and once your eyes adjust, Granny Smith apple sauce and a crisp acid profile play hide-and-seek on the palate, alternating flavour with acid. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 12.8%



93

Domaine Carneros, Ultra Brut, Carneros, Napa Valley, California 2017

POA Hatch Mansfield
The 2017 vintage in Napa was a good one, and it's very evident in this 52% Pinot Noir, 48% Chardonnay blend. The perception of sweetness exists with the coconut flavours that aren't shy to greet you. The acid is so well integrated – even in this nearly zero-dosage wine – that it takes a while to detect before the sensation dissipates. All in all, a delicious and well-made sparkler. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 12% ▶



92

Gruet, Blanc de Noirs, New Mexico NV

US\$17 gruetwinery.com

Gilbert Gruet of the Champagne house Gruet et Fils planted experimental vineyards in New Mexico in 1984 and the company has been producing sparkling wine from the US since 1989. This has lovely pear and apple fruit flavours, a soft, round texture and a well-integrated acid structure, as well as a bit of nuttiness. An easy sipper all round. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 12%



92

Argyle, Knudsen Vineyard Blanc de Blancs, Dundee Hills, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2019

US\$42.99 Total Wine & More

Argyle has led the way with Willamette Valley sparkling wines since it was founded in 1987. This wine is from a single block of own-rooted Dijon clone Chardonnay vines planted in 1990. Aromas of light banana and coconut on the nose. With lively acidity, it offers a party in the mouth. Perfect with lighter dishes. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 12.5%

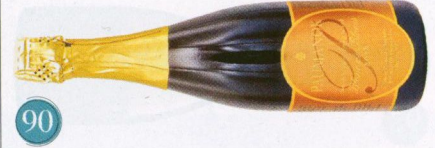


90

Paumanok, Blanc de Blancs, North Fork of Long Island, New York 2018

US\$55 paumanok.com

A traditional-method 100% Chardonnay from the well-established Long Island producer (which was founded in 1983), this has had 36 months' ageing on its lees. A remarkable freshness rises above the subtly autolytic characteristics of brioche. Bruised apple skin and a mineral component make this wine excite and delight the palate. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 12%



90

Ponzi, Nancy's Cuvée Blanc de Blancs, Chehalem Mountains, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2017

US\$80 ponzvineyards.com

A tribute to winery co-founder Nancy Ponzi, who planted the Chardonnay vines from which this wine is made more than 50 years ago. A nose of smoked almonds and marzipan with a subtle sweet texture of spiced fruit loaf, yellow apple skin and honeysuckle. The acid structure is well integrated, leaving a well-rounded feel to the palate. **Drink** 2023-2028 **Alc** 10.8%

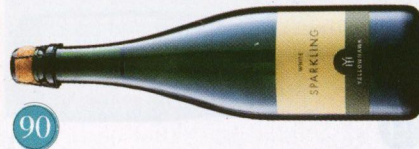


90

Yellowhawk, Sparkling White, Walla Walla Valley, Washington NV

US\$38 yellowhawkresort.com

Yellowhawk is Walla Walla's only winery that's dedicated to sparkling wine production. At a mere 10% alcohol, this 100% Chardonnay gives a little more than you might expect. As it sits in the glass it takes on the aromas and flavours of dried apricots; with a little citrus peel and good acidity levels, too. There's some unexpected minerality on the finish, but it works out well. **Drink** 2023-2026 **Alc** 10%

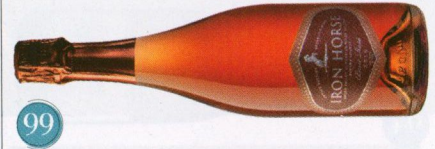


90

Iron Horse, Rosé Brut, Green Valley of Russian River Valley, Sonoma County, California 2018

US\$75 ironhorsevineyards.com

A mesmerising deep ruby colour, this Pinot-based wine is unexpected in every way. Tangy-sweet blood-orange vibes intertwine with wild strawberry and pomegranate. Cinnamon, nutmeg and cardamom stand to attention, directing the red fruits throughout, and the acidity is electrifying. The result is a wholly satisfying wine. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 12.5%



99

Cruse Wine Co, Cruse Tradition Rosé, California NV

£54 Stannary Wine

A 68% Pinot Noir, 32% Chardonnay blend sourced from several Northern California sites, including the Sierra Foothills, Sonoma and Napa. With a lovely tawny hue, this is a mélange of wild strawberries, pomegranate and watermelon with a hint of guava. With a healthy dose of reserve red wine, chalky minerals bounce across the mid-palate before it all reaches a crescendo at the finish. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 13%

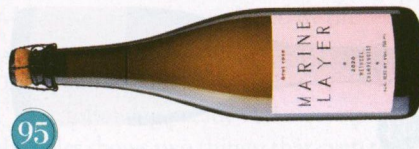


97

Marine Layer, Rosé Brut, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County, California 2020

US\$80 marinelayerwines.com

A 65% Pinot Noir, 35% Chardonnay blend that has spent 18 months on the lees, this is crisp and clean with a laser-like linearity not often found in Pinot-dominant sparkling. With just a kiss of colour and an amalgam of orchard fruits on the nose and palate, this single sparkling offering from the Marine Layer winery is a true standout. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 12.5%

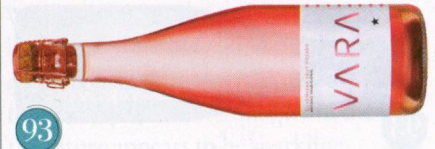


95

Vara, Silverhead Rosado Brut, Ancient Lakes, Washington NV

US\$27 varawines.com

This New Mexico producer delivers a sparkling wine from the Ancient Lakes, one of the cooler AVAs in Washington state. A blend of 75% Syrah and 25% Chardonnay, this has a fairly saturated pink hue, strawberry and kiwi-skin flavours, and an interesting, round acid profile, with hints of orange peel and freshly baked bread. Perfect as an aperitif or with shellfish or tuna tartare. **Drink** 2023-2027 **Alc** 12.5% **D**



93