

BEST COLD-BREW COFFEES DIY CASSIS LIQUEUR TIRAMISU ICE CREAM SANDWICHES

imbibe

LIQUID CULTURE



Summer's
Best Smashes

Picnic-Ready
Sparkling Wines

Destination
Martinique

The Summer
of Mead

Cherry
Cocktails



easy, breezy bubbly

Forget the black tie—
summer is prime time for flip-flops,
bbq and sparkling wine.



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Country Home Big Red Galvanized Tub, \$32, truefabrications.com



Effervescence is the essence of summer: crisp hefeweizens, Gin and Tonics, sodas and, for us, sparkling wines. From al fresco brunches to backyard barbecues to Fourth of July picnics beneath the fireworks, there's a bottle of bubbly for every warm-weather occasion. But which to choose? Better take this unofficial crash course on picking the best sparklers for the season.

Explore Before You Pour

To France and Beyond

Though the Champagne region of France is renowned above all for its bubbly, sparklers are produced around the world, in just about every winemaking region, from Germany and Italy to New Zealand and New York, from California and Chile to South Africa and even England (whose bottlings have generated a lot of recent excitement, though availability in the States is still sparse). Since the grapes used should be relatively high in acid and low in sugar when harvested, cooler climates where over-ripeness isn't a major concern have historically proven most suitable for bubbly production (not that it has stopped warm-climate winemakers from Mexico to Sicily). But hot weather is perfect for *drinking* bubbly, which—for all its carefully marketed mystique—is refreshing first and foremost, thanks not only to its effervescence but also its relatively low alcohol and, of course, the fact that it's served chilled.

How Sweet It Is

Sparkling wine runs the gamut when it comes to sweetness levels. In standard Champagne terminology, bubbly at the extremely dry end of the spectrum is labeled *brut nature*—which, as its alternative name, *zéro dosage*, implies, has no added sugar. At the other end is unabashedly sweet *doux*. In between, from drier to sweeter, are *extra brut*, *brut*, *extra sec* (or “extra dry”), *sec* and *demi-sec*; though *sec* translates as “dry” in French, bubblyies so labeled are actually off-dry to semi-sweet. Depending on what you're grilling, you might choose to go *brut* all the way, but sometimes a slightly richer sparkler, such as Italy's intensely floral Moscato d' Asti, brings just the right amount of sweetness.

Beyond Summer Whites

With few exceptions, using only the key grapes of the region—Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier—Champagne producers pull off limitless variations. Besides house blends of all three grape varieties, they may make *blanc de blancs* (“white from whites”) with Chardonnay; *blanc de noirs* (“white from blacks”) with Pinot Noir and/or Pinot Meunier; and rosé (whose pink hue comes from carefully controlled maceration—called *saignée*, i.e., “bleeding”—or the addition of still red wine to the *cuvée*). The rest of the world, including the other sparkling-wine regions of France, largely follow suit.

Though it's true that the market is dominated by whites and rosés, a stop at your local well-stocked wine shop may yield jewel-toned red and purple bubblyies as well. Notable examples come from Italy, namely Brachetto d'Acqui and the newly resurgent Lambrusco, and from Down Under, where the sparklers are based on Shiraz (aka Syrah). See our picks for summer-ready reds under \$30 on page 53.

SOMMELIER'S PICK

Patrick Bottex “La Cueille” Bugey Cerdon N.V. \$20

Looking for the ultimate summertime brunch bubbly? **Patrick Cappiello**, wine director and managing partner at Pearl & Ash in New York City, pops the cork on this vibrant rosé produced in France's Savoie region. A mix of Gamay and Poulsard, this bubbly is bottled at a mere 8 percent ABV. “It's fun and vibrant with just a hint of residual sugar,” Cappiello says. “It tastes as if rosé Champagne and a kabinett Riesling from Germany had a kid!”

Summer's Best Bets

Due to its wide stylistic and geographic range as well as its palate-cleansing, appetite-whetting fizz, sparkling wine as a category is especially food-friendly. When pairing, keep in mind the general rule that lighter wines call for more delicate dishes based on seasonal produce, seafood or poultry, while bolder wines warrant more robust fare: stronger meats and cheeses or spicy Latin and Asian flavors. Brut styles go great with salty flavors, and as you fire up the grills and smokers, consider sparklers that have a bit of body, such as *blancs de noirs*, and/or a little residual sugar to stand up to bolder flavors while adding a zingy contrast.

With burgers, master sommelier Brett Zimmerman, owner of the Boulder Wine Merchant in Colorado, pops rosé Champagne “that has spent some time in oak and has a fair amount of structure,” he says, like Vilmart & Cie Brut Cuvée Rubis N.V. (\$60). (You’ll also find a budget bottle for burgers on page 53.)

When it’s too hot to do anything but order take-out, Nathaniel Greenspan, wine director of Scampo in Boston’s Liberty Hotel, opts for bubbly with pizza—be it the Roederer Estate Brut N.V. (\$23) from Anderson Valley in California’s Mendocino County, or Franciacorta, “a mid-priced and often fantastic sparkling wine from Lombardy, Italy,” he says. “I particularly enjoy the Ca’ del Bosco Franciacorta Cuvée Prestige (\$38), which is a lovely blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco and Pinot Nero, with our cider-cured bacon, smashed ripe plantain and ricotta pie. Its crisp apple and almond notes enhance the sublime blend of sweet and savory elements.”

As for Prosecco, Greenspan points to Le Vigne di Alice Prosecco Extra Dry N.V. (\$22), whose ultra-juicy notes of pink grapefruit can cut through the fat of, say, a white pizza with prosciutto. The sweetest sparklers dare to flirt with moderately intense desserts based on seasonal fruits and can do double-duty with cured picnic meats. Take Moscato d’Asti from Italy’s Piedmont region, which, says Zimmerman, “is great for peach and berry tarts as well as certain types of *salumi piccanti*.”

Following are some suggestions for your next summertime soirée.

Sparklers for Lighter Fare

Gruet Blanc de Blancs Sauvage, New Mexico N.V. \$18

This 100-percent Chardonnay from Albuquerque’s acclaimed Gruet, founded in the 1980s by a Champagne native, is incredibly smooth despite its lack of added sugar. Aromas of green apple give way to mouth-fillingly tart and juicy bursts of lime, all the way through the finish.

Serve with: Mild, creamy cheeses with bread and fruit.

Spirit of the Andes Sparkling Torrontés, Mendoza, Argentina N.V. \$16

There’s a lot happening in this expressive extra brut (“extra brut” means it’s on the drier side of the sparkling spectrum)—toast crust, ripe pear, pomelo and honeysuckle, with a pleasant acidity upfront.

Serve with: Fresh white cheeses, such as chèvre and fruit preserves.

Lucien Albrecht Crémant d’Alsace Brut, Alsace, France N.V. \$19

Based on Pinot Blanc, this wine shows a classic brut profile—light, straightforward and palate-cleansing, with green-apple and yeasty notes.

Serve with: Smoked salmon.

Fox Run Blanc de Blancs, Finger Lakes, New York 2010 \$30

Honey-drizzled apple and a hint of buttered popcorn back up a generous amount of lemony sweetness in this New York sparkler.

Serve with: Deviled eggs.

SOMMELIER'S PICK

Naverán Brut Cava 2010 \$15

“This gem delivers so much bang for the buck it hurts,” says **David Speer**, who owns Ambonay Champagne Bar in Portland, Oregon. Produced with grapes grown on a century-old family-owned estate in Spain’s Penedès region, a glass offers up notes ranging from citrus and apples to sea salt and smoke. “It has an elegance I rarely find in Cava,” says Speer, “and is great with grilled veggies and seafood.”



web extra 

Check out our sparkling wine buying guide and a list of great bubbly bars around the country: imbibemagazine.com/JA13



Meinklang Pinot Noir Rosé Prosa, Burgenland, Austria 2011 \$16

This lightly fizzy, watermelon-colored, certified-biodynamic bottling has a more floral than fruity bent at first, but with a few minutes in the glass—don't drink it too cold—its vibrancy emerges.

Serve with: Strawberries and almonds.

Tapiz Chardonnay/Pinot Noir Extra Brut, Mendoza, Argentina N.V. \$19

Expect bread, lime and pear notes reminiscent of classic Champagne in this extra brut bubbly from Argentina.

Serve with: Ceviche.

Bolder Bubbly for Stronger Flavors

Frisk Prickly Riesling, Victoria, Australia 2012 \$11

This off-dry *pétillant* (translation: somewhat sweet and semi-sparkling) Riesling offers up notes of pineapple and banana along with florals and a slight zing of tonic water.

Serve with: Curried chicken salad.

Innocent Bystander Moscato, Victoria, Australia 2012 \$14

Carnation-pink in the glass, this mix of Muscat Gordo and Black Muscat grapes delivers loads of melon flavor—cantaloupe, honeydew and watermelon—plus pink grapefruit and rhubarb. And at just 5.5 percent alcohol, it's great for warm-weather sipping.

Serve with: Omelets filled with seasonal veggies—zucchini, corn, chard, etc.—alongside chicken sausage. Or go sweet with seasonal fruit tarts.

Mas de Daumas Gassac Rosé Frizant, Languedoc, France 2011 \$35

As quirky as they come, this vividly orange-pink sparkler is made from 90 percent Cabernet Sauvignon; aromas of strawberry and watermelon candy lead to similar flavors plus notes of lemon zest and walnuts.

Serve with: Dungeness crab or prawns cooked in a rich sauce of butter, vermouth and a pinch of chili flake, suggests Phillip Dunn, assistant wine director at Canlis in Seattle.

Medici Ermete Concerto Reggiano Lambrusco 2011 \$25

Balsamic vinegar and dry grape soda emerge on the nose and palate in this purple sparkler; noticeable tannins make it a great match for fried foods.

Serve with: Burgers or fried clams.

d'Arenberg Peppermint Paddock, South Australia N.V. \$28

Not for the faint of heart, this Chambourcin-based sparkler is deep purple and almost viscous. Cranberry dominates, along with savory, earthy notes and a distinctly astringent edge.

Serve with: Beef tacos or pulled pork.

Braida Brachetto d'Acqui, Piedmont, Italy 2011 \$30

The pale-garnet hue is no darker than that of some rosés, but this *frizzante* is full of flavor, hinting at everything from cranberry and raspberry to sugar cookies and apple juice.

Serve with: Naked chicken wings, or go for desserts like nutty biscotti with mixed berries or even, says Zimmerman, "chocolate, if it's not too intense." ■

SOMMELIERS' PICKS

Syncline Scintillation Blanc de Blanc 2009 \$40

"These guys are killing it," says Phillip Dunn of Canlis in Seattle. "What I like about this 100-percent Chardonnay from a really cool-climate site, Celilo Vineyard [in Washington], is its surprising concentration of fruit as well as acidity and its length. It works as an aperitif, but we have a lot of great shellfish up here, so I also recommend it with mussels and clams."

Királyudvar Tokaji Peszö Henye 2009 \$26

"This is a really cool Hungarian sparkling wine made with Furmint and Hárslevelü," says Jason E. Wagner, wine director at Henri and The Gage in Chicago. "It's dry and refreshing, but it also has body and richness—it's not so blazingly acidic that you need to lick a stick of butter. At Henri, we serve a Dover sole with spring peas and onions that matches its richness and brightness."