

SPARKLING WINE

The most well known sparkling wine is called by the name **CHAMPAGNE**. Why the name? As with virtually all wines of France, the wine name is the same name as the location of the place where the grapes are grown. The Champagne growing area is east of the city of Paris and north of Burgundy.

But, sparkling wine is made all over the world. There are several techniques for producing the bubbles that make a wine a sparkling one. In Champagne and in several other places in the world, the technique used is known by the name *Methode Champenoise* (*method traditionnelle, method classique, or metodo classico* [Italian]). The second best method is called the transfer method, which includes the same process as the classic method except the wine is removed from its bottle after the first fermentation, and transferred to a large container from which the wine is placed into bottles for the second fermentation. Inexpensive sparkling wine is made by a different process called *cuvee close*. The cheapest sparkling wine simply has carbonation added to still wine, in the same way carbonation is added to Coca-Cola. The first three methods involve the wine undergoing two separate fermentations.

Outside of Champagne, France good sparkling wine is made in other parts of France (usually called Cremant); in Italy in Trentino, Lombardy and Tuscany; in Spain in the Cava area; and on the West Coast of the United States. Less successful sparkling wines are made Friuli and Piedmont, Italy; in New York, Michigan, New Mexico and California, United States; in Australia; in Spain; and in South Africa. No great sparkling wine is made in the United States, but Roederer Estate, Domaine Carneros, Iron Horse and Schramsberg of California and Argyle of Oregon make very good to occasionally excellent wines. Gloria Ferrer and Mumm of California and Gruet of New Mexico make good sparkling wines. Spain's producers of great sparkling wines are Condornui, Parxet, Segura Viudas (of the Freixenet family of companies), and, producing from Chardonnay grapes, Rimat (part of the Condornui group).

Champagnes are generally made from one or more of only three grapes: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier, some being made entirely of Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier (blanc de noirs) or of Chardonnay (blanc de blancs). Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier are black/red grapes while Chardonnay is white/green. The skin is removed from the black/red grapes, so the liquid looks the same no matter the grape(s) used. Rose can achieve its color in several ways, but often it is by the addition of just enough regular Pinot Noir wine to give some color. In Northeastern Italy, the Prosecco grape is used for the sparkling wine called Prosecco; in that region and in Lombardy, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are used to make the top sparkling wines. In Piedmont, much very good to very poor sparkling wine is made from the Moscato grape. In Spain, the Chardonnay is used, but most sparkling wine is made using the indigenous grapes Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel-lo.

I have just compiled a list of my [recommendations from the on-line wine lists](#) of about fifty of Houston's restaurants. Sparkling wines I recommend include: Iron Horse Classic 2003 \$45, Krug 1996 \$425 (*17 Restaurant*); Heidsieck-Monople Rose 2000 (*Brasserie Max & Julie*); Charles Heidsieck Blanc de Blancs 1995 \$235 (*Brenner's Steakhouse*); Adami Prosecco NV \$21, Billecart Salmon Rose NV \$87, Roederer "Cristal" 2002 \$275 (*Catalan*); Rotari NV \$30, Bella Vista NV \$65 (*Damian's*); Gaston-Chiquet Rose \$60 (*Haven*); Charles Heidsieck Blanc de Blancs 1995 \$275, Iron Horse Russian Cuvee 2004 \$65 (*Masraff's*); Pommery Royal NV \$78

(Café Rabelais); Ferrari NV \$60 (*Tony's*). These are from Champagne, Veneto, Lombardy, Trentino, California. **Houston Wine Merchant**: Gaston Chiquet Tradition NV \$51.99, Iron Horse Russian Cuvée NV \$35.99, J Rose NV \$35.99, Louis Roederer Brut Champagne Cristal 2002 \$239.99, Roederer Estate L'Ermitage 2002 \$48.99. **Spec's Downtown**: Billecart Salmon Rose NV \$84.53, Bellavista NV \$51.31, Rotari NV \$13.95.

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