

Champagne: It's Not Just Bubbly Wine



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Champagne should only be called Champagne if it is made from three different grape varieties. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, and grown and produced in the Champagne region of France. The process of making Champagne, méthode champenoise, is very lengthy, expensive, and labor intensive. Wine from other parts of the world are called Champagne, because they share the same ingredients, and wine making technique. Although, to be true Champagne, it can only come from the Champagne region of France. To create the bubbles in Champagne, the wine is made then bottled and fermented. The bottle is placed in a rack narrow side downwards to collect the sediment. After the selected time of aging the bottle is placed in a freezing solution to freeze the sediment. The bottle is placed right side up, the cap removed and the frozen sediment shoots out of the bottle. Additional wine is then added with a specific amount of sugar. (depending on how sweet the winemaker wants the wine is what determines how much sugar is added) The bottle is then corked and placed in a rack to age a second time. This second aging is what creates the bubbles. The entire process takes a year or more. Cheaper wines can have bubbles added, by simply injecting carbon dioxide into the wine. However to achieve the best quality of wine the second fermentation method is the only way to go.

Sparkling wine is a wine with carbon dioxide in it. The carbon dioxide may result from natural fermentation, (either in a bottle, as described above the méthode champenoise, or in a large tank, the Charmat process) or by carbon dioxide injection. Most people call sparkling wine

Champagne, but many other examples of sparkling wine are produced all over the world. Cava comes from Spain, Asti from Italy, and Cap Classique is the South African term. Laws in Europe reserve the word Champagne for a specific type of sparkling wine from the Champagne region of France. The French use the term Crémant to refer to sparkling wine not made in the Champagne region. In Germany and Austria sparkling wines are called Sekt. Most sparkling wines are white or rose, but there are some red sparkling wines such as Brachetto from Italy, and Australian sparkling Shiraz. The sweetness of sparkling wines ranges from very dry brut to doux which are sweeter varieties.

The amount of sugar added after the second fermentation, and aging dictates the sweetness of the wine. Wines produced within the European Union must include the sweetness level on the label. The sweetness is measured by the number of grams of sugar per liter of wine.

Here is a breakdown of the terms and sugar levels:

Brut natural has less than 3 grams of sugar per liter

Extra Brut has less than 6 grams of sugar per liter

Brut has less than 15 grams of sugar per liter

Extra Sec or Extra Dry has 12 to 20 grams of sugar per liter

Sec has 17 to 35 grams of sugar per liter

Demi-Sec has 33 to 50 grams of sugar per liter

Doux has more than 50 grams of sugar per liter

So the next time you are in the market for a little bubbly, remember to be true to the wine. Champagne will come from France, and Sparkling Wine from everywhere else. Champagne, and sparkling wine should be enjoyed in a long fluted glass. Watch the bubbles as they rise to tickle your nose. And always remember, "Don't drink and drive". Cheers!

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