

ABOUT SPARKLING WINE!

When we think of Sparkling Wines, we tend to think about celebrations. But PLEASE do not wait for a special occasion to pop open a bubbly!! These wines have got to be the most "food-friendly" wines made, and they can pair with a wider variety of flavors than any other wine in the world. Salty foods, spicy foods, fried foods, Asian foods, fruits, cheeses, and the list goes on. In other words, feel free to crack open a sparkler whenever you'd like (and that could mean daily!).

Countries from all over the world produce Sparkling Wines, but only the Sparkling Wines from the Champagne Region of France can be called a true Champagne. (Spanish Sparkling Wine, for example, is called Cava). There are four methods to make Sparkling Wine:

The Traditional Method (méthode champenoise)- In the traditional method the sparkle is added to the wine by starting a secondary fermentation within each individual bottle of wine and then finishing and clarifying the resultant sparkling wine in the same bottle.

The Transfer Method - In the transfer method the process is almost the same, except that the final finishing and clarifying of the resultant sparkling wine takes place in a pressurized, bulk clarification tank.

The Charmat Method - In the charmat method both the secondary fermentation and the finishing and clarifying takes place in a pressurized tank and then the resultant sparkling wine is bottled.

The Carbonation Method - In the carbonation method instead of a secondary fermentation process creating the sparkle, carbon dioxide gas is injected into the still wine (like the process used to create carbonated soft drinks).

Categories of Champagne in order of driest to sweetest:

Naturelle
Extra Brut
Brut
Extra Dry
Sec
Demi-Sec
Doux



The méthode champenoise is a long process. That bottle that you are buying has actually been the wine's home for about 8-10 years. Once it goes through the second fermentation, the bottle is stored for 3 to 6 years "in tirage". This means laying on its side in dark, cool cellars, completely untouched. The magic that occurs during this time gives the wine its texture and flavor, and also creates a bit of sediment inside. This sediment will be removed from the bottle (after tirage is complete), by a process called "riddling". This involves taking each bottle and placing it upside down, at an angle, in a riddling rack, allowing the sediment to sink and collect at the cap of the bottle.

Next comes the fun part. The winemaker dresses in rain gear for the "disgorging" process. It is here where the sediment is removed by setting the bottle upright in a solution that flash freezes the bottle neck, coagulating that sediment into a solid "plug". Then, off with the cap, and out with crap. The pressure that has been created in that bottle over the years basically just blows that gooey sediment right out of the bottle! Picture an Indy 500 celebration, bottle after bottle. And yes, the room gets a little wet.

The final stage. If the winemaker wants to sweeten the wine, now is the time by adding a "dosage" to the bottle, or in other words a small mix of wine and sugar. Then the cork, the wire to hold it on, the foil wrap, and another year in storage before you can find it on the shelf to take home and enjoy. Wheew!!

The method champenoise is almost all done by hand. Thus, it warrants a bit higher cost, but the end product is top notch compared to the quicker methods (such as simple carbonation which can be done in weeks).

THE MÉTHODE CHAMPENOISE

