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Raise a glass of bubbly and bodacious champagne, sparkling wine or prosecco to ring in the new year

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Champagnes, sparkling wines, cavas and proseccos in a variety of hues at Effervescence.

Patrick Lorenz/provided by Effervescence

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When Dom Pérignon supposedly said, “Come quickly, I am tasting the stars!” after his first sip of champagne, little did the Benedictine monk know he had concocted something that would unite Sir Winston Churchill, Beyonce and Marilyn Monroe.

However, if those three walked into a party or restaurant, they would order different *cuvées* (French for blends) — for Churchill, Pol Roger; Beyonce, Armand de Brignac; and Monroe, Dom Pérignon — illustrating the diversity of taste and style of this famed sparkling sensation.

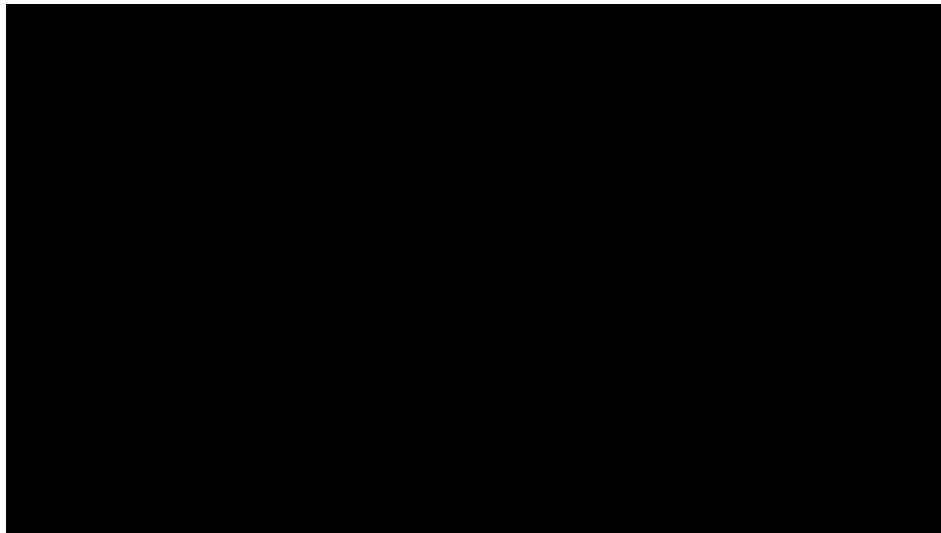
Today, the bubbly fan can order Champagne or other sparkling wine in all its varieties, such cava and prosecco.

But first, you need to know the basic terms. Champagne can be made only in the Champagne region of France in *méthode champenoise* — the way the second fermentation is completed, during which the bubbles are created. The grapes can be chardonnay (called blanc de blancs), or a combination of pinot noir or pinot noir and pinot meunier grapes (blanc de noir). The champagne color remains because these dark-

skinned grapes are pressed gently to keep the skins from bleeding into the juice, then separated out quickly. Pink champagne happens when the skins are left in longer or some red wine is added in during the second fermentation.

Generally, blanc de blancs are a bit lighter, dryer with a more “mineral” edge, while blanc de noirs have more body and a fruity “fleshiness.”

Can't see video below? [Click here.](#)



For champagne the scale from driest to sweetest is: Brut Nature, Extra Brut, Brut, Extra-Dry (or Extra-Sec), Dry (or Sec), Demi-Sec and Doux. A champagne can be non-vintage (NV), with grapes blended from more than one

harvest, or vintage, when grapes made from the harvest of a single year are used. There is a price difference, with vintage being more expensive.

Sparkling wine applies to anything produced outside of the Champagne region, and can encompass cava (Spain), prosecco (Italy), sekt (Germany) and crémant (France).

According to Marc Pelletier, wine and spirits consultant at Martin Wine Cellar, "Cavas and proseccos have gained in popularity, but my take on their upward turn is based on a few factors: economics: cava and prosecco have always been more economical versions of sparklers; and sparkling wine cocktails: As these have gained in popularity more people are searching for less expensive sparkling to 'adulterate'."

Grand house vs. grower-producer

You know the names: Moët et Chandon, Perrier-Jouët, Taittinger, Louis Roederer, with many of these champagne houses making sparkling wines (at a lower price point) in California as well. They're all good, and all generally have a consistent taste.

But want to throw a little bit of individuality into your champagne? Try one from a grower-producer. Unlike the big names, which get grapes from growers throughout the Champagne region to create their style of champagne, the grower-producer is just as it sounds – they grow and produce their own champagnes, which means there can be more of a difference year to year. Examples are champagnes by Jacquesson, Delamotte, Domaine F. Billiot & Fils, and Cédric Bouchard, a vineyard that uses organic grapes, with these types of champagnes becoming better known amongst aficionados. And then there are natural sparkling wines with only one fermentation (having “petillant”), but the risk is greater, and you may not be sure what you are going to get.

Flute, coupe or tulip?

What type of glass to serve champagne/sparkling wine can also be up for debate. Flutes preserve the bubbles longer and are best for dry champagnes or sparkling wines. Coupes gives a nostalgic feel, though the bubbles disperse faster – so drink up! But, after reviewing a number of articles by wine experts,

it seems the tulip glass is the preferred container to sip champagne and sparkling wine, with a white wine glass as a second choice.

Ring in the New Year – or any party

If you are hesitant to choose just one sparkling wine, take the pressure off by offering a variety, creating a tasting fete. Pelletier recommended a bottle each of prosecco, cava and rosé sparkling wine, as well as a non-vintage and vintage champagne. A standard bottle serves between five to six glasses, so if you are having a dinner party for six, everyone would get at least one taste of each.

Edouard Majoie, manager of the French Quarter champagne bar Effervescence, recommends Philipponnat Brut Royale Reserve, while owner Crystal Hinds says with a small dinner gathering she would start with a Gusborne Brut Reserve from Sussex, England, then the Murgo Metodo Classico sparkling rose, grown by Mount Etna in Sicily (she has even visited the vineyard), then move to a Champagne. “I am loving the Sylvie Paulhiac-Delalot ‘Explosion’ Extra Brut.”

Not sure what to get? A visit to a wine shop is a great place to start. Effervescence offers more than 160 Champagnes and sparkling wines and 32 by the glass. You can order flights of half glasses or full glasses grouped in various themes. It's a sparkling way to start to your new year.

Check out the video (link above) of Emeril's sommelier, Taylor Terrebone, sabering a champagne bottle. Emeril's, along with Commander's Palace, have received the Grand Award from The Wine Spectator for having the best wine cellars in the city.

Bottle service

The standard bottle of champagne holds 75 centiliters. There are smaller and larger bottles than shown here, but for simplicity these are the best known. The large bottles of champagne are named after Biblical figures.

Magnum: 1.5 liters, or 2 bottles

Jeroboam: 3 liters or 4 bottles

Methuselah: 6 liters or 8 bottles

Salmanazar: 9 liters or 12 bottles

Balthazar:12 liters, or 16 bottles

Nebuchadnezzar: 15 liters, or 20 bottles

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