



Hold the Sugar with Brut Nature Champagne

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With its relatively moderate climate and winemaking philosophy that veers toward the elegant rather than the showy, Champagne is by default stylistically drier and more understated than its traditional method bubbly counterparts in places like California and Spain. Even still, you may find Brut Champagne a bit too round on the palate. Or maybe your palate is craving something different. Do yourself a favor this season and uncork a bottle of Brut Nature.

Also referred to as “zero-dosage,” Brut Nature Champagne is made by tweaking a crucial last step before bottling. After *dégorgement*, which is the practice of freezing the neck of the bottle to remove the yeast sediment, all Champagne is “topped off” with what’s called the *liqueur d'expédition*, a mixture of wine and sugar. The amount of sugar regulates the style: Brut, Extra Brut, or Demi-Sec, for example. But with Brut Nature, no sugar is mixed with that wine topper offer, which renders the Champagne austere--in a good way. Think about the flavor of lemon juice versus lemon curd or lemon cream, and that’s one relevant descriptor for Brut Nature--leaner, tarter, drier. While Brut Nature still accounts for 1% or less of the entire Champagne market, it’s a segment that’s growing and resonating with an increasing number of wine fans.

CHAMPAGNE AYALA

“Brut Nature shows our ability to create wines of great purity and elegance, without ‘makeup’ so to speak,” explains Caroline Latrive, chef de cave at [Champagne Ayala](#). The house has a history with low dosage Champagnes; their 1865 vintage had only 22g/l sugar, versus the 100g/L which was de rigueur at the time. But Latrive is quick to point out that her philosophy is to align with the style of the house rather than the trends of the day, so she won’t simply make a zero-dosage wine for its own sake. “[Our] Brut Nature is marked by freshness, elegance, and rigorous grape selection.” She works with sixty to seventy crus from all over the region to select the most outstanding grapes from which to achieve balance, ferments in inox stainless steel to preserve purity, uses malolactic fermentation to “curve the angles and bring a deeper aromatic palate” and ages four years on the lees to intensify aromas. The process of lowering the dosage is much more complex and nuanced than just a wine that lowers sugar levels, she points out; it also requires some patience to allow the bubbly to open up, evolve and reveal itself in the glass. She adds, “In a world where everything moves so fast, Brut Nature is an invitation to feel, be part of the present because the wine really evolves as you drink it and changes quite dramatically!”

Champagne Ayala Brut Nature NV (\$63), aged for four years, this expression from the house founded in 1860 hits the perfect balance of angularity and tart acidity without becoming too austere. Alongside seared scallops and steamed lobster, it can lend the same brightness as a squeeze of lemon on the dish.