

A Guide To Sparkling Wines That Aren't Champagne To Celebrate The Holidays

From Italy's popular prosecco to Spain's cava, there are numerous alternatives to explore that deliver a range of flavors and styles.



While champagne has long been synonymous with celebration, not all sparkling wines carry this prestigious name.

According to French law, only sparkling wines produced in the Champagne region of France using specific methods can be labeled "champagne."

Champagne is made primarily from three grape varieties: chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. It is produced using the *méthode champenoise*, or traditional method, which involves a secondary fermentation in the bottle. After the wine undergoes its initial fermentation, sugar and yeast are added, and the wine is sealed to trap carbon dioxide, creating bubbles. The bottles are aged on their lees (dead yeast cells) for a period of time to develop complexity. The wine is then disgorged to remove the lees and topped with a dosage, a mixture of wine and sugar, which determines its sweetness level before final corking.

The primary difference between champagne and other sparkling wines lies in the production method and the grapes used. Some other sparkling wines are made using the *charmat* method, in which secondary fermentation occurs in large tanks. This method results in a lighter, fruitier wine. Additionally, the grape varieties differ by region. (See *crémant* below for the most prime example.) These differences in grape types and production methods lead to varying flavors, textures and price points among sparkling wines.

Regardless of the differences, many high-quality sparkling wines from other regions offer a comparable experience. Just look at Italy's popular prosecco, a brunch mainstay in the U.S. these days (especially thanks to its lower price point). And even within Italy, there are so many more options that deliver a range of flavors and styles.

With options from countries like Spain, Germany and other winemaking regions in France outside of Champagne, there's a sparkling wine to suit every occasion and preference.

"You can find great value with *crémant*, sekt and some cava wines," says Grant Reynolds, founder of Parcelle, an independent New York City-based online wine business, via email. "Franciacorta is similar in price. Prosecco should be much less expensive, and with sekt and cremant you can find different ranges, but usually less than a bottle of champagne."

For wine enthusiasts looking to expand their palate, the world of sparkling wine extends far beyond champagne. These alternatives often highlight local grape varieties, offering unique taste profiles and a sense of place.

Reynolds suggests going for any wines based on chardonnay and/or pinot noir grapes since these are the main grapes of champagne.

“So if you like champagne, this is a safe bet when going into unknown regions. I like cremant de Bourgogne [Burgundy] and Penedes Reserva, a region in Spain with all organic grapes,” Reynolds says. “Both areas have some producers whose style is really similar to champagne, but half the price.”

Here’s a closer look at some of the most well-known sparkling wines beyond champagne.

Crémant

Crémant is France’s answer to affordable sparkling wine from regions outside Champagne. Produced using the traditional method, crémant comes from areas like Alsace and Burgundy. It’s crafted from local grape varieties and provides a high-quality alternative with a similar production process.

Example: Langlois 'Classique' Crémant de Loire Brut: Crémant de Loire is made in France’s Loire Valley using the traditional method. Langlois, owned by the Bollinger family since the 1970s, has been producing sparkling wine for over 130 years. This classic and dry sparkling wine is primarily made from chenin blanc, aged for at least 24 months, resulting in a wine that is rich and refined. It offers aromas of quince, peach and grapefruit with a fresh, long finish. Other grape varieties include cabernet franc and chardonnay, and the wine has a crisp, fruity style with an ABV of 12.5%.