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## 9 Affordable Sparkling Bottles Better Than the Big-Name Champagnes

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From *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961)

Courtesy of Jurow-Shepherd



As the holidays approach, it's time to start stocking up on the bubbly. Not only are sparkling wines the obvious choice for celebratory toasts, but they can also be fantastic with a meal—especially rich foods, like roast meat, or creamy cheese, or anything fried—and their effervescence provides a much-welcome digestive aid during these times of feasting.

It's easy to grab that big-name, yellow label bottle you see in so many storefronts and on the shelves. But there are some beautiful sparkling wines out there, including actual true Champagne, that are much more flavorful, nuanced, elegant, and—even better—easier on the wallet, than those *grand marc* Champagnes. Here's a list of small-production, bubbly bottles to drink with the ones you love this holiday season.

<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/salvard-premier-cru+l+ouverture+blanc+de+noir+brut+champagne+france/1/usa>) This Pinot

Noir-based Champagne (yes, even though Champagne is white wine, it's often made from red grapes) is a fantastic representation of the Grower Champagne world—meaning, the winemaker also owns and farms the vineyards, which is rare in this region. It's got just a bit of structure from the Pinot Noir, and enough intense, mouthwatering acidity to make this a wonderful food wine. You'll be shocked that this wine doesn't cost more.

**Tarlant Brut Zero, \$50** (<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/tarlant+brut+zero/1/usa>)

This Grower Champagne is "Brut Zero," also called "Brut Nature," meaning there is no addition of dosage, a sweetening element. The result is a very pure wine, with clear fruit notes, and a bright burst of acidity. This wine with sushi, or a salad course, is incredible, although it could also be drunk on its own. Again, you'll be amazed by the value here.

**SoloUva Franciacorta, \$35** (<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/solo+uva/1/usa>)

Franciacorta is a region in Italy that makes sparkling wines in the Champagne method, and this bottle shows how special and beautiful Franciacorta can be. Made from Chardonnay grapes, it has a nice, robust texture, but it's completely dry. No sugar is added to this wine. Have it with a cheese plate at the end of your meal, for a perfect pairing.

**Domaine Foreau, Crémant de Vouvray, \$30** (<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/philip+foreau+dom+du+clos+naudin+sec+vouvray+touraine+loire+france/1/usa>)

Sparkling Vouvray, made from 100 percent Chenin Blanc, is a timeless classic. In France, "Crémant" denotes any wine that's made in the same style as Champagne, but not from that region. If it says "Sec" on the label, you'll know it's bone-dry. It's easy to find good value in Crémant wines, and the best examples come from the Alsace region, as well as the area of Limoux, and the Loire Valley—like this Vouvray from Foreau. It has an intense acidity and creamy texture, which together make a balanced wine, perfect on your holiday table.

**Raventos i Blanc Cava "de Nit," \$20** (<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/raventos+i+blanc+de+nit+rose+penedes+cava+catalonia+spain/1/usa>)

Cava is sparkling wine, made with the Champagne method in Northern Spain; this producer, Raventos i Blanc, farms biodynamically and is widely considered one of the absolute best examples of cava. This rosé is a light pink hue, and it's on the mineral side rather than fruity, making it a perfect wine to pair with turkey or ham, although, you'd be very happy sipping this alone or with some creamy cheese.

**Cruse Wine, St-Laurent pét-nat, \$28**

<http://www.crusewineco.com/our-wines/>) There are a lot of good examples out there of pét-nat (<http://www.vogue.com/13367958/pet-net-sparkling-wine-champagne-alternative/>) (that's slang for "*pétillant-naturel*," a sparkling wine that's made in a more natural style than Champagne, with just one fermentation instead of two, and less aging)—but Michael Cruse, in Sonoma, California, is a devoted student of sparkling wine, so this one is worth seeking out at your local natural wine retailer. St-Laurent is a red Austrian grape that you don't normally find in California, but Cruse is one of those nerdy winemakers who loves to work with forgotten grapes. Pink, fizzy, dry, loaded with berry notes—this wine is a winner as aperitif.

**Gamine, Grenache pét-nat, \$28**

<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/gamine+wine/1/usa>) This refreshing, delicate bubbly rosé shows how nuanced sparkling wine can be. Kate Norris, one-half of the urban winemaking team Division Wine Co. (<https://www.divisionwineco.com/>), in Portland, Oregon, makes this under her own label, with Grenache from some of the best vineyards in southern Oregon. It's savory with ripe berry overtones—perfect with a first course of crudités, or anything fried.

**Les Capriades, "Pet-Sec," \$27** (<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/les+capriades+pet-sec/1/usa>)

This is an eternal favorite: a masterful sparkler made by two guys in the Loire Valley who have devoted themselves to making the best pét-nat possible. Their passion is evident in this wine, which delivers vibrantly energetic bubbles, clear acidity, and overwhelming freshness. Have it as aperitif, during your meal, or toward the end; you'll be happy to include it in your holiday festivities at any point.

**Agnès and René Mosse, Moussamoussettes, \$23** (<http://www.wine-searcher.com/find/agnes+rene+mosse+moussamoussettes+pétillant+rose+loire+de+table+france/1/usa>)

The tiny hint of sweetness in this rosé pét-nat from one of my favorite winemaking families, in the Loire Valley, is so refreshing, and don't worry, it's not *too* sweet. When you need a sparkling wine to whet your appetite during meal prep, or just hanging out with

family and friends on a winter afternoon, this one goes down so easy and puts a smile on everyone's faces. The grapes in here are Grolleau Gris and Gamay, two red grapes that have just enough minerality to keep the wine lifted even though it's off-dry. Try it with stinky blue cheese.

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