

THE POUR

# 12 Summer Sparkling Wines, Because Who Needs a Reason

Beyond Champagne, excellent bubbly now comes from all over in a diversity of styles. You don't require a special occasion to enjoy them.



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times



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July 23, 2020



The world may not offer much to celebrate right now. Nonetheless, it's a great time to drink sparkling wine.

Champagne, of course, sets the standard with its capacity for elegance, grace, subtlety and depth. But many other types of sparkling wine are available now as well, from unexpected places and a diversity of styles, making this summer a great time for a joyous exploration of the sparkling repertory.

I don't think I'm going out on a limb to say that humans are fascinated with fizziness. From a child's pleasure at blowing bubbles to our lifelong enjoyment of soft drinks and beer, to the purely adult satisfaction of watching Champagne beads float upward in a glass, we are taken with what sparkles.

The pleasure is visual; it's aural, as in the seductive sound of a pop and pour; and it's tactile. Bubbles from a good sparkling wine feel great in the mouth.

I recently scoured the online selections of Manhattan wine shops, looking for moderately priced bottles of sparkling wines other than Champagne.

Why omit Champagne? Mostly because of its price. While it's possible to find bottles as cheap as \$25 or \$30, most good Champagnes these days start at roughly \$40.

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I decided that I wanted both to look for less expensive bottles and to explore the rest of the sparkling wine world. So I picked 12 sparkling wines other than Champagne, up to roughly the \$40 point at which good Champagne starts to be available. The most expensive bottle among my 12 cost \$41.

These bottles are not at all intended as Champagne replacements. They each offer their own personalities and pleasures, which can be enjoyed without reference to that overpowering presence among sparklers.

Champagne, by the way, has been having [a tough time](#) through the pandemic months. With bars and restaurants closing, and people not feeling particularly festive, sales have dropped sharply.

Buy Champagne if you like, by all means. There's much to explore, from the best of the [big houses](#) to new names among the small [grower-producers](#). But to look beyond Champagne is not to turn your back on it. It's rather to open yourself to additional sparkling expressions, many of them distinctive in their own rights.

Several of the bottles I selected fall into the [pétillant-naturel](#) category, which has gained tremendously in popularity over the last decade, primarily from its association with natural wines. Pétillant naturel, or pet-nat, is most likely the oldest form of sparkling wine. Indeed, it's often referred to on French labels as *méthode ancestrale*.

By this method, the wine is simply bottled before it has completed its fermentation. As it finishes in the bottle, the carbon dioxide, a byproduct, has nowhere to go and so produces the bubbles.

Champagne, and many sparkling wines made the same way as Champagne, employ two fermentations to produce the bubbles. A still wine is made and then bottled with the addition of something sweet, like unfermented grape juice, and yeast. This produces a second fermentation in the bottle, along with the sparkle.

One other production method, often called Charmat after its inventor, Eugène Charmat, involves the bulk production of sparkling wine in tanks. Good wines can be produced using this method, like Tajad Frizzante from [Le Vigne di Alice](#), a Prosecco-like wine I recently [wrote about](#), but none are among these choices.

You won't see any Proseccos here, either. As popular as the wine is, I have not found many interesting bottles recently, although I do recommend the Tajad Frizzante.

Here, then, are a dozen excellent summer sparklers, arranged in order of ascending price. Remember, these are just 12 of many worthy bottles. For additional options, please consult past articles on bottles [under \\$20](#), [cava](#) or [pétillant naturel](#).