







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Seven Essential Tips For Serving Champagne on New Year's Eve

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Every wine tells a story...
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Countless bottles of Champagne and sparkling wine will be opened tonight as we welcome the New Year. These are some essential tips for serving Champagne or any of the many delicious alternatives such as Italy's Prosecco and Franciacorta, Spain's Cava and the sparkling wines of California.



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1) Temperature

The ideal temperature for serving Champagne is around 48°-50°F. The best way to chill Champagne is to place it in a bucket with ice and water for around 30 minutes, or in a refrigerator for a few hours. Most refrigerators are set to 35°-38°F, which means a bottle straight out of the refrigerator will be too cold to appreciate fully. Far too much Champagne is served frigid, at which point the flavors will be totally unexpressive. If you are opening Champagne straight from the refrigerator, the best choice is to open it and then let it warm slightly before serving.



Remove the foil wrapper and gently untwist the wire cage off the cork

2) Remove the Foil and Cage

Remove the foil wrapper and gently untwist the wire cage off the cork, holding the bottle upright. Use your thumb to keep the cork from releasing unexpectedly.



The cork should emerge from the bottle softly, with a whisper, not a bang

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3) Open Gently

Firmly grip the cork with one hand and gently twist the bottle from its base with the other hand, while keeping the bottle at an angle and pointed away from you and your guests. The cork should emerge from the bottle softly, with a whisper, not a bang. Powerful Champagnes and those from tightly wound vintages (1996 comes to mind) will benefit from being opened an hour or two in advance.



From left to right: classic flute, two versions of the standard white wine glass, modern flute, Pinot Noir stem

4) Choose the Right Glass

The standard flute is in reality a poor choice for Champagne because it constricts a wine's aromas and flavors, much in the way a dress or suit that is two sizes small is uncomfortable. All you need to enjoy Champagne is a standard white wine glass or one of the more contemporary flared flutes that are becoming increasingly popular. For Champagnes with a high percentage of Pinot Noir, including Rosés, I often prefer a larger glass, such as a Pinot stem, which allows for the breath of the wines to come through. Make sure your glasses are clean and polished to get the purest bubbles.

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5) Serving

Hold your glass at an angle and pour a small amount of Champagne into the glass. Let the foam subside, then pour a little bit more into the glass. This will help preserve the bubbles. Champagne warms quickly, so I prefer to fill glasses to about a third or half way. If you are using a larger stem a smaller pour is better, just as you would do with a good red wine.

6) And Beyond...

While Champagne is of course a great way to kick off a celebratory evening, it is also a fabulous and versatile wine at the dinner table. For a truly decadent experience, try serving a progression of Champagnes over dinner.

7) Top Picks

These are some of my favorites wines to ring in the New Year, including a few budget-friendly choices from Italy, Spain and California.

Budget

NV Nino Franco Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore Rustico \$17 (Italy)

2011 Raventos i Blanc De La Finca \$35 (Spain)

Mid-Tier

2010 Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs \$40 (US)

NV Jacquesson Cuvée 738 \$75

2009 Pierre Péters Brut Millésime L'Espirt \$90

For the Adventurous Palate

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2008 Chartogne-Taillet Brut Millésime \$65

2010 Christophe Mignon Brut Nature Blanc de Noirs Pur Meunier \$68

2009 Francis Boulard Brut Nature Blanc de Blancs Les Rachais \$90

Money is No Object

2006 Taittinger Comtes de Champagne \$200

2006 Dom Pérignon \$165

2007 Roederer Cristal \$249

2002 Gosset Extra Brut Celebris \$195

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