

SevenFiftyDaily

Sommeliers' Top 10 By-The-Glass Sparkling Wines

Beverage pros from around the country share their essential BTG bubbly to fuel the holiday festivities



The U.S. wine industry has waged a years-long, heroic campaign to remove sparkling wine from the special-occasion pedestal and convince drinkers to embrace the category as an everyday indulgence. But even as bubbles are finally being enjoyed all year long, the age-old association between carbonation and celebration remains, and consumption of all things fizzy still climaxes during that magical stretch of the calendar known as the holidays.

For sommeliers and beverage directors, the annual festivities mean one thing: maintaining a steady rotation of excellent by-the-glass options to fuel the seasonal cheer. Fortunately, the U.S. sparkling wine market has never been broader or more diverse, with an unprecedented array of styles and expressions to choose from.

When *SevenFifty Daily* asked ten buyers which bubbly bottles they're banking on for their BTG lists this holiday season, their responses ran the gamut from elegant grower Champagne to cloudy Italian *col fondo*, German pét-nat, Crémant du Jura, and more. (All wines are listed with price per glass.)

1. Piri Naturel Mathilda Silvaner Blend 2020, Nahe, Germany; \$18

Served by Jodie Battles, beverage director, JK Food Group, Boston

For the recently opened Faccia a Faccia and Bar Pallino, conceived as a speakeasy-style natural wine bar located below a coastal Italian restaurant, JK Food Group beverage director Jodie Battles highlights producers that share a core ethos of organic farming and low-impact winemaking. She fell in love with this fizzy German pét-nat—a blend of the Silvaner, Kerner, and Riesling grapes—the moment she tasted it. “[Winemaker] Christine Pieroth’s family has been making wine for hundreds of years in a very classic way, but she broke out to do her own line focusing on organic and natural viticulture, which is our focus at Bar Pallino and Faccia a Faccia,” says Battles. Highlighting the wine’s freshness and “super versatility” with food, she likes to pour it alongside bar snacks like Bar Pallino’s foie gras torchon with sweet and sour apricots.



2. In Sordina Ciano Macia Glera Frizzante IGT 2020, Veneto, Italy; \$17

Served by Raquel Vo, wine director, Tonchin Brooklyn, Brooklyn

Sommelier Raquel Vo actively welcomes “the challenge of non-intuitive pairings” at Brooklyn’s Tonchin, where they have assembled a thoughtful list of natural-leaning wines to complement the restaurant’s emphasis on raw seafood and Tokyo tonkotsu-style ramen. To Vo, that means leaning hard on wines that allow them to “play with texture, fat, and softness,” such as this bottle-fermented, *col fondo*-style Veneto sparkler that sees three days of skin contact. Vo likens it to “eating an apricot at the beach in the early hours of the morning,” noting that it possesses the briny backbone and tension toward which Vo inherently gravitates as the grandchild of a fisherman. “I look for salinity and coastal influence in a lot of my wines,” Vo says. “They remind me of home.”

3. Keush Origins Brut NV, Vayots Dzor, Armenia; \$16

Served by Scott Stroemer, bar director, Galit, Chicago

With its seasonal and localized approach to dishes of the Middle East and Israel's immigrant cuisines, the "unwritten wine rules" at Chicago's Galit prohibit the inclusion of any selections from Napa, Italy, or France. According to bar director Scott Stroemer, the point of this constraint is "not to discourage those regions," but rather "to celebrate what makes the wines of the Middle East so unique." Forced to explore beyond the usual bubbly horizons, one of his earliest discoveries was the Keush Origins Brut, a traditional-method blend of Armenia's indigenous Voskehat and Khatouni grapes that has been one of the list's longest staples. "Both grapes are full bodied and high-acid, making them ideal for sparkling wine," says Stroemer. "This has been our little secret at Galit since opening in 2019, but the wine is too good not to get noticed."

4. Zuccardi Cuvée Especial Blanc de Blancs Brut 2016, Mendoza, Argentina; \$25

Served by Nicolás Andrés Martianhes, head sommelier, Balvanera, New York City

The list at Manhattan's Balvanera exists as an ode to the glorious yet still unsung diversity on display across Argentina's various growing regions. "We honor the better-known, world-class wineries as well as the boutique, small-production houses, and everything in between," says head sommelier Nicolás Andrés Martianhes, who looked to the perilously steep slopes of the Andes to discover this traditional-method Chardonnay from Mendoza's Uco Valley. Grown at elevations of up 3,600 feet, the wine possesses all the qualities of a great Champagne, according to Martianhes, plus a purity and finesse that speaks to its cool-climate, high-elevation origins. To him, it's a perfect match with yellowtail crudo: "The acidity of the bubbles works brilliantly alongside the freshness of the fish and the richness of the ajo blanco."



5. Domaine Hubert Clavelin Brut Comte Crémant de Jura NV, Jura, France; \$15

Served by Liz Martinez, wine director, Mink and Marrow, Detroit

“I have been having a little bit of a love affair with Crémant lately,” says Liz Martinez, the beverage and hospitality director at Detroit’s Mink and Marrow restaurants, who is drawn to the category for both its value and uniqueness. The example she’s featuring on the tightly curated, Old World-centric list at Mink and Marrow’s sister establishment, The Royce, a combination wine bar and retail shop located in the city’s historic downtown, is Domaine Hubert Clavelin’s Brut Comté. This traditional-method Jura sparkler combines “a luxurious texture” with notes of “sweet apple and ripe stone fruit” and “lively and bright acidity,” according to Martinez. Priced at \$15 per glass, it “checks off a lot of boxes,” she explains, making it a versatile BTG pour for guests whose tastes range “from the adventurous to the everyday.”

6. Pierre Gimonnet Cote Collection Blanc de Blancs NV, Champagne, France; \$25

Served by Mia Van de Water, MS, head of beverage operations, Cote Korean Steakhouse, New York City and Miami

“At Cote, we pour all of our wine BTG exclusively out of magnums, so we wind up custom bottling almost everything,” explains Master Sommelier Mia Van de Water, the head of beverage operations at Cote Korean Steakhouse’s locations in New York and Miami. For their customized, large-format Champagne pour, the restaurant partners with none other than Pierre Gimonnet, the legendary Côte des Blancs-based grower who Van de Water calls “one of the ultimate OGs of farmer fizz.” The resulting Cote Collection Blanc de Blancs is a “vibrant, mineral-driven, food-friendly” Champagne that aligns with the restaurant’s core value of “supporting the little guys” while complementing the saline aspect of omakase menu dishes like shigoku oysters topped with Hokkaido uni and lime zest or the restaurant’s signature “steak and eggs”: hand-cut filet mignon tartare and caviar spread on Korean milk toast.

7. Red Tail Ridge Perpetual Change Réserve Perpétuelle Brut Nature NV, Finger Lakes, New York; \$19

Served by Danya Degen, wine director, The Duck and the Peach, Washington, D.C.

According to wine director Danya Degen, the beverage program at D.C.’s woman-owned and operated The Duck and the Peach directly supports like-minded businesses “through exclusively featuring womxn makers and owners in our wine program” and giving “a platform to these makers and owners to showcase their wines to our guests.” Featuring wines from across the U.S. “with a nod to the coastal regions that inspire us,” her by-the-glass list currently highlights this “delightfully blush-colored” traditional-method sparkler from Nancy Ireland of Red Tail Ridge in the Finger Lakes. “Finding a bubbly that

works for our ethos and makes everyone super happy is always a win,” says Degen. Calling it “a beautiful domestic alternative to Champagne,” she’s a fan of the wine’s complex marzipan-like note, the result of the solera-aged reserve wine included in the final blend.



8. Lanson Père et Fils NV, Champagne, France; \$28

Served by Tonya Pitts, sommelier and wine director, One Market Restaurant, San Francisco

Depending upon the seasonal items in the kitchen, Tonya Pitts pours a wide range of sparkling selections—both international and domestic—by the glass at San Francisco’s One Market Restaurant. But she says this complex, long-aged Champagne from the historic house of Lanson will be her mainstay this year. A special cuvée specifically designed for restaurants, the Lanson Père et Fils strikes her as the ideal all-purpose bubbly. “It can be your first sip or it can carry a meal,” says Pitts, adding that the wine’s extended aging (a minimum of five years) and high percentage of Grand Cru sites gives it an unexpected level of elegance. “I like the idea of longer aging for complexity, and the profile is surprisingly fresh,” she explains—a quality that allows her to pair it with boldly flavored dishes like chef Mark Dommen’s grilled octopus with sunchokes and romesco.

9. Raventós i Blanc de Nit Brut Rosé 2020, Catalonia, Spain; \$16

Served by Christopher Struck, beverage director, ilili restaurant, New York City

Overseeing the lists at ilili's locations in Manhattan and Washington, D.C., beverage director Christopher Struck draws inspiration from Lebanon's ancient tapestry of culinary traditions—a place where, as he puts it, “beverage, food, and people are one and the same.” In keeping with the country's timeless spirit of hospitality, this year he's pouring the Raventós i Blanc de Nit Brut Rosé, a tangy, frothy pink sparkler from one of Catalonia's pioneering organic estates. “Its notes of raspberry, blood orange, minerality, and biscuit play surprisingly well with myriad different Lebanese dishes from our menu, just as they do with seasonal American holiday favorites,” explains Struck. In this way, it offers diners a perfect balance between experimentation and crowd-pleasing familiarity.

10. Philippe Fourrier Blanc de Noirs Brut Pinot Noir NV, Champagne, France; \$25

Served by Rachel Van Til, wine director, The Clubs at Houston Oaks, Houston

“My BTG list always follows the same rule: 75 percent comfortable, 25 percent adventurous,” says Rachel Van Til, the wine director at The Clubs at Houston Oaks. When it comes to Champagne—always a core component of her program this time of year—that means rotating in “names that are familiar to our members,” such as Louis Roederer or Charles Heidsieck, alongside small, independent growers like her latest obsession, Philippe Fourrier. Deliciously rich and bursting with red-apple flavors, this complex Blanc de Noirs hails from the Côte des Bar, Champagne's southernmost subzone, where the fifth-generation Fourrier family farms a mere 18 hectares of vines. “With prices of Champagne going up, it's taken a lot more digging to find exciting wines that fit this price point,” says Van Til, but discoveries like this make the search worth it.