

Champagne to add sparkle to Christmas and New Year

Some excellent sparkling wines have closed the quality gap with champagne

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John Wilson



Sparkling wine sales rocket at this time of year, as we celebrate the festive season with friends and family. As large parties seem very unlikely, why not give yourself an upgrade this Christmas and New Year and instead of prosecco, go for a champagne or seriously good sparkling wine? I guarantee you will notice the difference. There are swingeing duties on sparkling wines, so few will ever be cheap.

Until recently there was a big gap between champagne and most other sparkling wines, both in price and quality. Less so now, as we have some excellent sparkling wines from the UK, and Catalonia in Spain in particular. France has its crémants, from Alsace, the Loire and Bourgogne, and Australia, New Zealand and South Africa all produce very good fizz.

If you want to buy Irish, David Llewellyn now makes the excellent sparkling **Lusca Blanc de Noir** from grapes grown in Lusk, Co Dublin (€70, from llewellynorchards.ie, Terroirs, Wine on the Green, Bradleys and McHughes).

I probably don't drink as much sparkling wine as I would like to, simply because with two of us at home most of the time, a bottle is too much, and you pay a hefty premium for a half bottle. Three of today's wines are available in half bottles and jnwine.com has halves of the excellent **Froget-Brimont Brut 1er cru** (€25.95). Another option is to drink champagne throughout the meal – it goes amazingly well with a wide variety of foods – but in winter many of us crave a glass of red wine with dinner most of the time.

If none of the wines featured here work for you, there is plenty of choice elsewhere. O'Briens has a number of excellent options, including the **Langlois-Château L'Extra** (€18.95), the **Canals Nadal Cava Brut Nature Reserva** (€19.95) and the **Beaumont des Crayères Grande Réserve champagne** (€29.95).

Dunnes Stores has the excellent **Lombard Grand Cru** (a steal at €36), Aldi the **Veuve Monsigny Brut** (€19.99) and **Philizot Blanc de Noirs** (€29.99) and Lidl the **Bissinger Premium Cuvée Brut** (€29.99).

Whelehan's has the **Bouvet-Ladubay Saumur Saphir 2018**, very good value at €22. Mitchell & Sons has a great selection of champagne, including the excellent **Leclerc-Briant Brut Réserve** (about €60) and **Jacquesson 743** (€75) and the newly available **Philipponnet Royale Réserve** (€65), also available from siyps.com, and 64Wine.

Those of you who suffer from an allergy to sulphur could try the **Champagne Chavost Blanc d'Assemblage** (€55, independents) made without any added sulphur. As you can see, I am fond of good champagne.

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secco, the best option is either the **Rizzardi Rizzardi Spumante** (€17.95) both from

O'Briens, while the **Aldi Castelloro Prosecco Spumante** (€11.49) is probably the pick of the supermarket offerings.

Raventós i Blanc 2018, Conca del, Rio Anoia (organic)

12 per cent, €30

A very fine sparkling wine from Catalonia that offers great value for money. Light and creamy with subtle fizz, floral delicate green apples and a light nuttiness. Drink it by itself or with toasted almonds and cheesy nibbles before dinner.

From: Jus de Vine, Portmarnock, jusdevine.ie; Baggot Street Wines, Dublin 4, baggotstreetwines.com; Blackrock Cellar, Blackrock, blackrockcellar.com; Clontarf Wines, Dublin 3, clontarfwines.ie; Green Man Wines, Dublin 6, greenmanwines.ie; Drinkstore, Dublin 7, drinkstore.ie; Sweeneys, Dublin 3, sweeneysd3.ie; siyps.com; Margadh, Howth, margadhfoodandwine.ie; Manning's Emporium, Bantry, manningsemporium.ie; A Taste of Spain, Dublin 1; Provider, Dublin 6W, provider.ie.

Champagne A.R. Lenoble Intense Mag 16 NV

12 per cent, €55 (half bottles €30, magnums €120)

A wonderfully elegant champagne with floral aromas, a fine mousse, intense pure mineral fruits, citrus peel, a touch of brioche and a long bone dry finish.

From: Greenacres, Wexford, greenacres.ie.

Champagne Louis Roederer Collection 242

12 per cent, €56-65, half bottles €33

A very fine mousse, elegant rich fruits, peach and apple with gorgeous grilled almonds and brioche and a reviving fresh acidity. Collection 242 is a worthy follow-on from Roederer's **Brut Premier**, for many years their most popular champagne.

From: La Touche, Greystones, latouchewines4u.ie; Mortons of Galway, mortonsofgalway.ie; Donnybrook Fair, donnybrookfair.ie; Cabot and Co, Westport, cabotandco.com; O'Briens, obrienswine.ie; Jus de Vine, Portmarnock, jusdevine.ie; Whelehan's Wines, Loughlinstown, whelehanswines.ie; wineonline.ie; Searsons, Monkstown, searsons.com; the Corkscrew, Dublin 2, thecorkscrew.ie. Half bottles available from Searsons, the Corkscrew and wineonline.ie.

Charles Heidsieck Brut Réserve NV

12 per cent, €73.99 (half bottles €43.99)

One of my absolute favourite champagnes. Made using a high percentage of mature wines, and aged for three years on its lees, this is an irresistibly opulent champagne, full of ripe exotic fruits, toasted nuts and brioche. Perfect with or without food.

From: Neighbourhood Wine, Dún Laoghaire, Bray, neighbourhoodwine.ie; O'Briens, obrienswine.ie; Mitchell & Son, Dublin 1, sandycoveandavoca.com; Avoca, Kilmacanogue and Dunboyne, donnybrookfair.ie; millsands.ie; Avoca, Ballsbridge and Rathcoole,

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avoca.com; Ely Wine Store, Maynooth, **elywinebar.ie**. Half bottles from Jus de Vine and Ely Wine Store.

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