

INSIDER

The best Champagne, Prosecco, Cava, and other sparkling wines for any budget



Champagne, a favorite beverage for toasting, comes from its namesake region in France. Aged in individual bottles, many enthusiasts prize the limestone soil where the grapes are grown. Because of the region's rules and prestige, bottles labeled Champagne are generally more expensive than those from other places.

But there's more to sparkling wine than just Champagne. Prosecco from Italy and Cava from Spain generally cost less but are often their own enjoyable experience. Producers from all over the world follow similar methods to make sparkling wine. The results are much more accessible and affordable than Champagne.

For our guide, we recommend a variety of options at various prices, based on consultations with wine experts and our research. Because you

can ask several experts for their suggestions and see no overlap — which is what we did — we took into account that taste is very subjective, and that's why there is no single winner.

The market is also tricky: You can find certain brands everywhere, while smaller producers tend to distribute in limited areas. That doesn't mean one is better than the other, but we tried to factor in availability with our choices.

Check with your local wine shop for availability.

Cheat sheet to picking a bottle of Champagne or sparkling wine

Short on time? If you need a bottle of Champagne or sparkling wine now, here are our recommendations if you can't explore our entire guide.

- **The best Champagne for showing off**
When the budget doesn't matter: Krug Grand Cuvée (about \$200), Salon Le Mesnil Blanc de Blancs Brut 2004 (about \$650), Bollinger Brut Special Cuvée (about \$60)

The best Cava

The best Cava under \$20

Penedès, a region of Catalonia, Spain, is known for its sparkling wine called Cava. Compared to Prosecco, Cava is made more similarly to Champagne — aged in bottles. The grapes are very different, though, with many wines being made from a mix of macabeo, parellada, and xarel·lo grapes. There's a lot of variety when it comes to Cava, including vintages and rosés.

Like Prosecco, it is much more affordable than Champagne. But just because you can pick up a bottle for \$10, it doesn't mean you need to hold your nose and drink. While inexpensive Cavas do make great

choices for mimosas or bellinis, you can also enjoy them in their own right.

- Juvé y Camps Reserva de la Familia Brut: Aged for 36 months, this Brut wine from the Penedès region is made from 55% xarel·lo grapes, with some macabeo and parellada grapes as well. Notes: apple, citrus.

The best sparkling wine

While all of the wines mentioned in this guide are, technically, sparkling wines, the ones mentioned here focus on wines mostly from the United States.

The best sparkling wine over \$25

It's not just US winemakers that have vineyards in California. Some big Champagne houses, like Taittinger Champagne and Louis Roederer, have land in the state. That's why wines from Roederer Estate, for example, are lower than a typical Champagne. Larger producers will often stick to more traditional methods and grapes, while smaller producers might experiment more. Caraccioli Cellars, for example, is a smaller, family-run vineyard in California.

"The big difference between a big house and a small house (a big producer and a small producer) is how they're handling the wine," Ball said. Smaller operations often lack machinery, so they hand turn or hand riddle the bottles. That's one reason it took some US winemakers a while to get into sparkling wine, she said: "It takes a lot of work."

You can find sparkling wines from the United States that cost over \$100, for bottles producers have taken extra time and attention with or that come from a particular vintage. There are many quality wines for closer to \$50, though.

- Iron Horse Classic Vintage Brut 2013: From California's Russian River Valley area, this Brut is made from pinot noir and chardonnay, aged for four years. Notes: apple, floral.