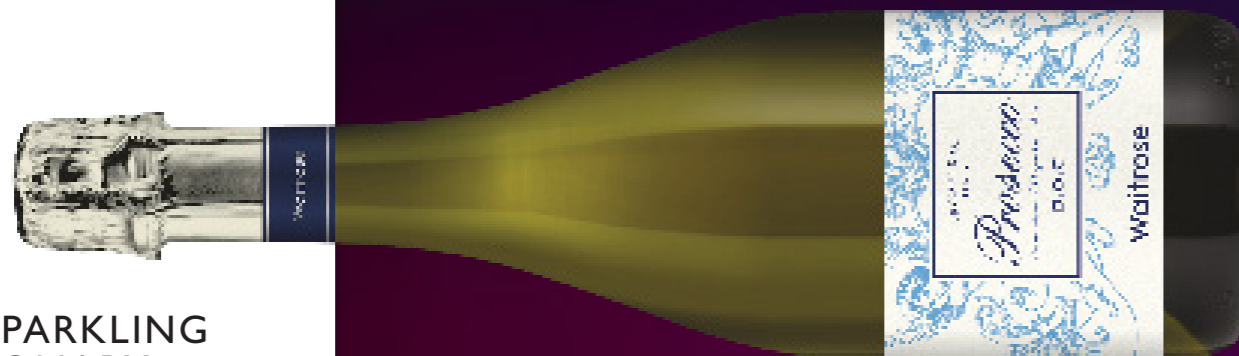


# School OF fizz

'Tis the season for a glass of something cold and bubbly, but do you know your Cava from your Champagne from your Crémant? A little knowledge will take you a long way

**T**here is never a wrong time to open a bottle of fizz, but Christmas always feels like the most right. That popping cork triggers a Pavlovian response; it signals good times are coming. And while it's easy to grab whatever's on offer, knowing a few basics makes it easier to find a bottle that reflects the flavour, budget and mood you're looking for. Start armed with the knowledge that good fizz doesn't just come from France – then let the bubbles lead you... »



## THE SPARKLING DICTIONARY

How to decipher labels like a pro

### Wine styles

#### NON-VINTAGE (NV)

A blend of wines from two or more years. Most Champagne is NV to keep a consistent 'house style'.

**VINTAGE** In the Champagne region, everything in the bottle must come from grapes harvested in a single year (rules vary elsewhere).

#### BLANC DE BLANCS

Translates as 'white from white'; in Champagne, this typically means 100% Chardonnay. Fresh, with hints of lemon meringue pie and cream.

**BLANC DE NOIRS** Meaning 'white from black' – or Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes. Richer tasting, often with crisp berry notes.

### The sweetness scale

Dryness is expressed in grams of sugar per litre, but the language can be tricky

**EXTRA BRUT** Very dry (0-6g/litre)

**BRUT** Dry (less than 12g/litre)

**EXTRA DRY** Confusingly, this is actually sweeter than brut (12-17g/litre)

**SEC** Translates as 'dry' but actually more akin to medium in style (17-32g/litre)

**DEMI-SEC** Meaning 'half-dry', but it is sweeter than sec (32-50g/litre)

**DOUX** French for 'sweet' (more than 50g/litre)

### PROSECCO

This hugely popular fizz comes from Italy's northeastern corner. Its slight sweetness makes it a winning brunch and party option, while its affordability means no special occasion is required. The principal grape is Glera, and most is made using the sealed tank method (see overleaf). Look closely at the label: cheaper bottles are labelled as DOC (denomination of controlled origin) but step up to DCOG (denomination of controlled origin with secured bond) for wines with more complexity and character.

**THE TASTE** Green apple, ripe pear and melon, with a more pronounced sweetness than Champagne or Cava.

**TRY** Waitrose Prosecco, Italy (£7.99/75cl). Generously frothy, with aromas of white flowers, green apple and citrus. A great-value all-rounder, lovely as an aperitif or in a cocktail.



### CAVA

The word for 'cellar' in Spain's Cataluña region, where more than 90% of Cava comes from. Local grapes (Macabeo, Parellada and Xarel-lo) are used, though Chardonnay and Pinot Noir can feature too. Cava must be produced using the traditional method and aged on its lees for at least nine months.

**THE TASTE** It has lower acidity than Champagne, for an easier-to-drink, fresher style. Many Cavas offer green apple and citrus notes. It's not as sweet as Prosecco, so good if you prefer a drier fizz.

**TRY** No.1 Castillo Perelada Cava Brut, Spain (£11.99/75cl). Made by one of the top Cava producers, this combines classic apple and citrus flavours with a green-olive, savoury edge.



### ENGLISH FIZZ

The success of the English wine industry is worthy of a fizz-opening celebration in itself – there are now more than 1,000 vineyards across the UK, mainly in England. As with Champagne, the three most-used grape varieties are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and

Pinot Meunier; most English fizz is made using the traditional method. Given economies of scale and our, shall we say, unpredictable weather, price tags can be high – but so is quality, with English fizz often winning in blind tastings against the big French houses.

**THE TASTE** English sparklers reflect our cooler climate, with crisp apple and citrus flavours overlaying toasty complexity.

**TRY** Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé NV, England (£35.99/75cl). A salmon-hued Cornish example with crunchy red fruit and a hint of cream – a real treat.

### CHAMPAGNE

Luxury in liquid form, Champagne is a mood-lifter and scene-setter par excellence. The word has become shorthand for all sparkling wine, but to claim the name it must come from that specific region of northern France. It must also be made using the traditional method, with a minimum of 12 months on its lees and a further three months' ageing (see overleaf). Most Champagne is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, and is

non-vintage (see left). Because of the time and effort it takes to produce, good Champagne never comes cheap.

**THE TASTE** Lengthy ageing creates that characteristically complex, toasty taste that underscores flavour notes of citrus, cream, stone fruit and apple.

**TRY** Piper-Heidsieck Brut NV, France (£38.99/75cl). A blend of the three classic grapes, with fine bubbles. Orchard fruit flavours complement its buttery richness.

**'That popping cork triggers a Pavlovian response; it signals that good times are coming'**



### NEW WORLD SPARKLERS

Producers from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and North and South America have taken to bubbles with gusto. Many are made with Champagne grape varieties and the traditional method, while others use the transfer method (see overleaf).

**THE TASTE** Often a riper, more forward style – a result of the (usually) warmer climates. They can be sweeter too.

**TRY** Jansz Premium Cuvée NV, Australia (£18.49/75cl). A fresh, traditional-method fizz from Tasmania, blending lemon curd and toasted brioche. »

## HOW DO THE BUBBLES GET IN THERE?

*Trapping tiny globes of dissolved carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the fermentation process takes skill and technique, but there is more than one way to get that coveted sparkle*

### TRADITIONAL METHOD

'Méthode traditionnelle' is used to make Champagne, Cava and other top sparkling wines. The grapes are pressed and undergo a first fermentation as with still wine (though the grapes are picked earlier to retain higher acidity).

Next, sugar and yeast (liqueur de tirage) are added. The wine is bottled, tightly stoppered and stored for several months, while a second, in-the-bottle fermentation takes place. Eventually, the yeast dies; contact with these dead yeast cells (known as lees) gives the wine its toasty character.

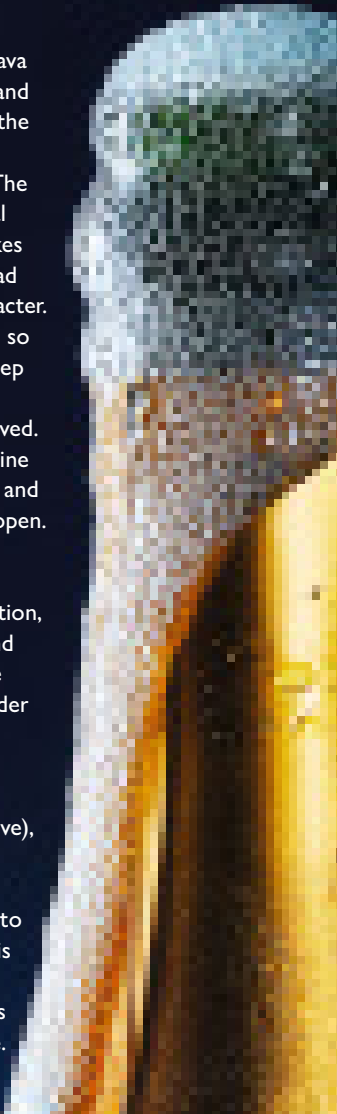
In a process called remuage, the bottles are inverted, so the yeast sediment gathers in the neck. For the next step (disgorgement), the neck of the bottle is frozen so the sediment is forcibly expelled when the stopper is removed. The bottles are topped up with dosage, a mixture of wine and sugar syrup (this determines the wine's sweetness) and the bottle is recorked until it's ceremoniously popped open.

### SEALED TANK

Faster and less labour-intensive. After its first fermentation, the wine is held in a pressurised tank to which yeast and sugar are added. After a rapid second fermentation, the wine is clarified, the dosage added, then it's bottled under pressure. This method is used to make most Prosecco.

### TRANSFER METHOD

The wine is matured as for the traditional method (above), but the tricky remuage and disgorgement steps are dispensed with. Instead, the bottles are chilled, their corks removed and the wine is sucked out and filtered to remove the sediment. Dosage is added, then the wine is re-bottled under pressure and corked. Many Australian sparklers are made this way; it has the taste that comes from ageing wine on its lees, but is less labour-intensive.



\*DOWNLOAD THE JOHN LEWIS APP OR ORDER ONLINE AT JOHNLEWIS.COM AND CLICK & COLLECT FROM A WAITROSE STORE



## COUPE vs FLUTE?

The age-old question always gets wine buffs going. Coupe naysayers say the shallow shape causes bubbles to disappear faster, but the glasses do make you feel like you're shimmying in *The Great Gatsby*. As Master of Wine Peter McCombie puts it: "While I can't say they're the best for fizz, they are kind of silly and fun, and isn't drinking fizz supposed to be fun?"

In recent years, a hybrid white wine/flute has become popular among the pros – it treats the bubbles well, and the wider opening lets you smell and taste the aromatics. A good white-wine glass can work well too.

Fizz does need to be kept cold though – not just because it tastes better, but because warmth might increase the pressure inside the bottle, causing the cork to explode rather than pop. Store it in the fridge before serving and keep the bottle chilled as you drink.

*Visit [waitrose.com](https://www.waitrose.com) to find all these drinks and more. Delivery and Click & Collect are available\**

\*SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY. CUSTOMERS MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF AGE. FOR TERMS AND CONDITIONS, SEE [WAITROSECELLAR.COM](https://www.waitrose.com). PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRINT. STANDARD DELIVERY IS AVAILABLE FOR £5.95 OR FREE FOR ORDERS OVER £150. CLICK & COLLECT IS AVAILABLE FOR £3.95 OR FREE ON ORDERS OF £100 AND OVER.

**Please Drink Responsibly**

# SAVE OPENED FIZZ PRESERVE BUBBLES FOR A DAY OR TWO WITH A STOPPER – A SILVER SPOON IN THE NECK OF THE BOTTLE WON'T HELP



Stainless Steel Champagne/Prosecco Bottle Stopper (€6.50), John Lewis†