

Havant U3A Wine Appreciation Group

6th Lockdown Newsletter 23rd May 2020



A very warm greeting to all members of our wonderful wine appreciation group and I trust you are well and finding a silver lining amongst the current restrictions.

Breaking News (well it was earlier this month):

English winemakers have warned that at least half of this year's grape harvest has been wiped out by heavy frost. The air frost that hit last week caused "catastrophic" damage to buds that had bloomed earlier than usual thanks to a warm start to the year. About 75% of buds at Denbies Wine Estate in Surrey, which produces 500,000 bottles of wine a year, were affected.

England has 133 wineries, which produced 13.2 million bottles in 2018 and 10 million in 2019 (less because of bad weather) from 700 vineyards.

What do you call the 1st May (from the 3rd Lockdown Newsletter)

I was disappointed that no one asked me about 'День Победы,' did you think it was a typo? Perhaps you all Googled it and found it was a 'red' herring?

Not much feedback on NZ Sauvignon Blanc verses Loire either, to be specific only Nick got back to me with 'for me, Loire SB is distinguished from NZ wine by subtlety and style,' thank you Nick. Decanter invested a bit of time and money into this about one year ago (<https://www.decanter.com/learn/loire-vs-marlborough-sauvignon-blanc-differences-413312/>) and I am sure the findings are still current. Loire SB occupies the green fruit (apple, gooseberry and cut grass) spectrum and can be floral, steely, zingy, flinty or even slightly peachy depending upon which appellation it comes from. NZ SB tends to be more pungent and intensely flavoured but still with green fruit at its core but filled out with riper, tropical fruit flavours.

There are about 123,000 hectares planted worldwide, 10,000 in the Loire, 21,000 in Marlborough.

Study Topic

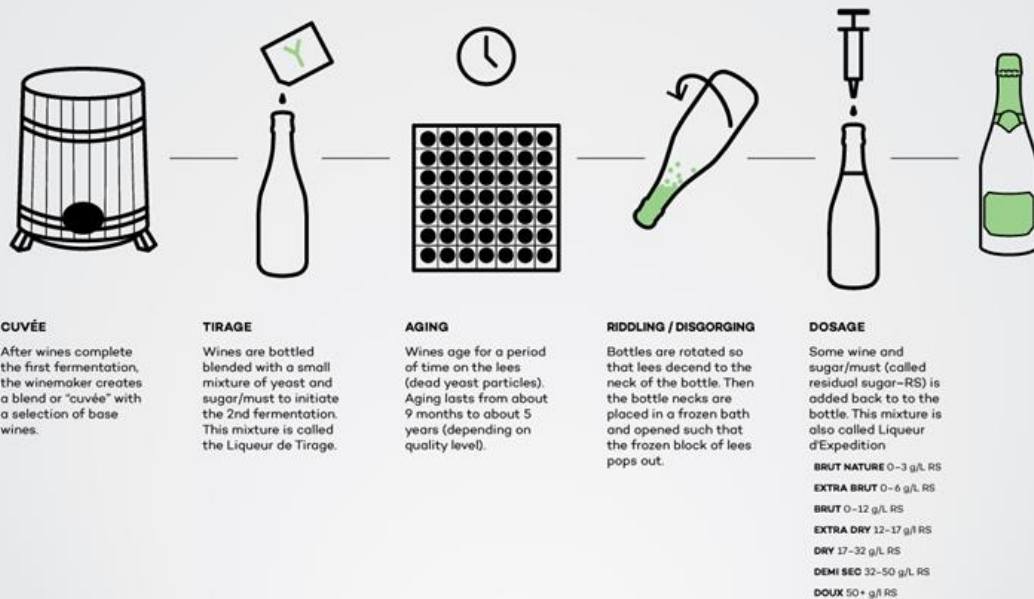
And so to this week's study topic, sparkling wine! Sparkling wine is a wine style characterized by effervescence in the wine due to high levels of carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide in the wine can come from secondary fermentation in the bottle, in a pressurized tank or from carbon dioxide injection.

Sparkling wine is produced throughout the world but time, space and the reader's tolerance suggests I limit myself in this Newsletter to the well know ones from France, Italy, Spain and Germany and outline production methods.

Let us deal with champagne first because it's the easiest as there is a lot written about it. Most of us know that the name is a legally protected by an 1891 treaty but not respected by all countries. To be called Champagne in the EU, and many other countries, the wine has to be made in the French Champagne wine region and produced according to the rules of the appellation and this includes secondary fermentation in the bottle, referred to in France as 'méthode champenoise.'

Champagne is a costly wine to produce. The grapes are the most expensive in France. Most champagne houses don't own nearly enough vineyards to provide for their needs so they have to buy in grapes from small growers. This demand pushes up the price. Seven grape varieties are allowed but Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay are most widely used. Circa 27 million bottles shipped to the UK in 2018.

Traditional Method SPARKLING WINE PRODUCTION



 WINE FOLLY

Take a look at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/dec/30/uk-sales-of-champagne-and-sparkling-wine-lose-their-fizz-in-past-year>

Champagne has slumped in popularity in the UK over the past year, while consumers also kept other forms of sparkling wine on ice. Sales of the premium French bubbly fell by 28% from about 18m to 13m bottles in the last recorded 12 months, leaving the UK market worth £613m – or about £47 a bottle (not where I shop, GW).

There are many different sparkling wines regions in France, for details see <https://winefolly.com/deep-dive/sparkling-wines-france-much-champagne/> **As a group we have often enjoyed Crémant de Loire.**

Prosecco. Made in the Veneto region of Northern Italy from a minimum of 85% Glera grapes by the Charmat method. 65% of all sparkling wine exports from Italy are Prosecco with 110 million bottles shipped to the UK in 2018, thought to be less in 2019, whilst Champagne sales have increased, see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/11/25/champagne-regains-number-one-spot-prosecco-britains-battle-bubbles/>

Other leading Italian sparklers include Franciacorta, Asti Spumanti and Lambrusco. Franciacorta, from the Lombardi region, is produced using the metodo classic, aka the method champenoise. Asti and Lambrusco use the Charmat method.

Frizzante vs Spumante - Frizzante has a minimum bottle pressure of 1.0 bar and maximum pressure of 2.5 bar. The carbon dioxide can either be natural or come from a gas injection. Natural carbon dioxide is always the result of the Charmat method, aka Metodo Martinotti. Spumante bottle pressure is at least 3.5 bar.

The Charmat method was invented by Federico Martinotti from Asti, an Italian oenologist. It is a much cheaper manufacturing process as it allows large-scale production with significantly less manpower.

Cava. Unlike Prosecco which gets its bubbles in a tank, Cava is made in exactly the same way as champagne, by bottle fermentation requiring additional handling processes like riddling and disgorging although I am sure this is all automated, albeit at considerable capital cost. Cava did, probably still has, an image problem which has not been helped by chasing mass markets with low pricing and small margins. To tackle this some producers have introduced a premium category, called cava de paraje calificado, with stringent guidelines: the vines must be at least 10 years old; the grapes must come from a specific vineyard; there are restrictions on grape yields and the wine must be aged for at least three years in the bottle.

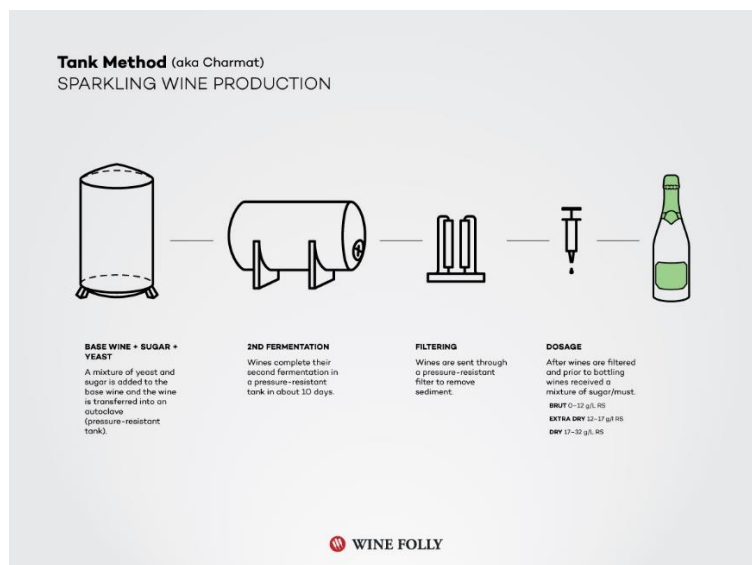
Cava is made mainly in Catalonia but a little is also produced in Rioja and other parts of Spain. It's usually made from a trio of Catalan grapes, Macabeo, Xarel-lo and Parellada. Circa 25 million bottles shipped to the UK in 2018.

Sekt. Since its inception in the 1820s, Sekt has endured a lifetime of mediocrity. This is because Sekt had low quality standards which allowed a tidal wave of cheap bubbly into the marketplace. On the positive side, everyone drinks the stuff (really, *only when I am in Germany or Austria, GW*).

Did you know that Germans consume more sparkling wine on average compared to any other country in the world with figures of around 5 bottles enjoyed per person annually? This impressive (*personally I do not find it impressive, GW*) consumption figure sits at five times that of the USA. The size of Germany's thirst for fizz means that a lot of its home produced sparkling wine is initially purchased as wine or grape juice from abroad and then given its bubbles on German soil. Over 80% of the Sekt that is made in Germany is also consumed there. Though German sparkling wine has a mixed reputation, known more for cheaper and poor quality sparkling wine (Sekt) it does produce some finer quality labels. Is it expected that we will be seeing more German fizz for sale across Europe and beyond?

'Sekt' is the lowest quality and can be made from imported grapes or juice. 'German Sekt' is claimed as quality sparkling wine using affordable German grape varieties like Müller-Thurgau, both Sekt and German Sekt are made by the Charmat method. 'German Sekt b.A.' is made from grapes grown in one of the 13 official German Wine Regions, like Riesling, Silvaner and Pinot Noir, using the traditional (Champagne) method. 'Winzersekt' is the best quality made from exceptional single varietal (mainly Riesling) estate grown grapes, vinified where grown by the traditional method.

See <https://vinepair.com/wine-blog/champagne-vs-prosecco-vs-cava/> for a summary of the headline differences between Champagne, Prosecco and Cava, and some facts. Note that the 'Bottles Produced' are based on 2013/4.



Ken's Italian Adventure



Our Newsletter Number 4 (9th May) reminded Ken, with a little help from his Granddaughter, of a trip he made to Tre Monti's Imola Estate in 2016 where their website states that they grow Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pignoletto and Merlot grape varieties (*not sure why Sangiovese and Albano are not listed*). He bought an Albano (grape variety) Secco Vigna and a Campo di Mezzo, the latter made from Sangiovese grapes which his Granddaughter said was the favourite of one of the more recent Popes. Why is it that the Catholics get the best! Ken is sure he brought one of these to the Wine Groups 2016 Christmas Party but I do not recall sampling it, probably too busy in the kitchen.

The restaurant chosen for lunch had a wonderful buffet laid out and the group salivated but they were turned away because it was for the local road mending gang. Is that why they have no potholes in Northern Italy?

What it is to have a Granddaughter with an excellent memory!



The Quiz!

1. Define sparkling wine?
2. What grape variety is most quality Sekt made from?
3. Why, as a general rule, is Champagne more expensive than other sparkling wines?
4. What is 'Méthode Champenoise' called in Spain and Italy?
5. What does 'en tirage' mean?
6. What is the Charmat method and where was it invented?
7. Name five major Italian sparkling wines?
8. How is the sweetness, or dryness, of Champagne controlled?
9. What is disgorging?
10. In which Italian region is Prosecco made?
11. What is riddling, or to use the French word, remuage?
12. Name two approved champagne grapes other than Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay.
13. What grape variety is Prosecco made from?
14. Where which Spanish region is most Cava made?
15. Are there bubbles inside your bottle of 'fizz' when you buy it?

Answers, queries and challenges are always welcome, contact gworthingt@aol.com

Feedback is always welcome, in fact needed to inspire the team of writers, contact details:

Nick (hawardn@googlemail.com)

Steve (steve.cook99@btinternet.com)

Geoff (gworthingt@aol.com)

Geoff Worthington