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# WINE, SPIRITS & FINER FOODS

# SPEC'S

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The Wine School at l'Alliance Française  
WINE 101: A Four-Week Course  
on Wine Basics  
for more details see page 5



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## WINE OF THE MONTH!



### Elyssia Gran Cuvee Brut Cava NV - \$19.99 cash

Elyssia Gran Cuvee Brut brings the idea of symmetry to life with the combination of traditional Macabeo and Parellada Cava grapes blended with international favorites Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. This wine offers a sophisticated bouquet of roasted nuts, citrus fruit and honey with layers of complexity through the palate. Flavors of lemon and melon are followed by a spicy finish.

If you enjoyed this selection, try others of the same style:

- Elyssia Pinot Noir Brut Cava NV - \$19.99
- Castellblanch Brut Zero NV - \$9.99
- Castellblanch Cristal Semi Seco NV - \$7.94
- Castellblanch Sparkling Rosado - \$8.51
- Castellblanch Extra Brut NV - \$7.94

## Go-To Bubbles To Go by Charles M. Bear Dalton



There are a lot of wines you don't need me to tell you about. There is very little point in me writing a review of Kendall Jackson Vintners Reserve Chardonnay. Or Sutter Home White Zinfandel or Georges DuBoeuf Beaujolais-Villages. In the sparkling wine category, you don't need me to tell you about Moet & Chandon White Star, Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label, or Mumm Cordon Rouge. Come to think of it, maybe you could use

some info on the first of those bubbliies; Moet is changing the name of the wine from White Star to Imperial but keeping the style the same. Nevertheless, these are extremely popular products you already know well and you either drink them or you don't based on your experience with them.

Where I can be of help is to tell you about some of the new, the off-beat, the quirky, and the value-priced products that are not yet well known or broadly distributed. These can be some of the most interesting wines on the market but, unless someone tells you about them, you'd never know about them. Here are some of my go-to picks among these more interesting bubbliies.

Continues on page 3

Inside This Issue: Collin's Column, Deli Specials, The 12, Delicious Mischief, Wine and Cheese of the Week & more!

Go-To Bubbles To Go *from page 1*

### BEST BASIC BUBBLE BET

No matter how big a Champagne geek you are, you occasionally want a Mimosa or a Kir Royal. And you'd prefer that it be made with something that is cheap but actually tastes good by itself. Alan Christopher is that everyday, keep a bottle in the 'fridge bubbly you need.

#### ALAN CHRISTOPHER Brut Blanc de Blancs Sparkling, France, NV

12x750ml \$7.97 \$89.21

24x187 \$3.99 \$89.38

Tech: 11.5% Alc. Fermented using Charmat process. Pale straw in color with green highlights, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium light-bodied with fresh acidity. Offers lively bright lemony fruit and a surprising level of toastiness along with a subtle mineral note. Long, clean finish. Lively and refreshing. Much better than the price would indicate. *Very Good. BS: 86+VHR.*

#### ALAN CHRISTOPHER Brut Rosé Sparkling, France, NV

12x750ml \$7.99 \$89.54

Tech: 11.5% Alc. Fermented using Charmat process. Vivid red-pink in color, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium light-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics. Bright and lively with strawberry-cherry-citrus fruit accented with a bit of bubblegum dust. Very long finish. Fresh, lively, refreshing. *Great value Rosé bubbly. Very Good. BS: 85+HR.*

### GRUET

Not very often do you find an American sparkling wine that a Francophile prefers to Champagne but such is the case with wine importer Dan Kravitz and Gruet. Kravitz has been known to serve Gruet to his sales force at his national sales meeting. To be fair, some of that preference may have to do with price as Gruet is less than half the cost of most mid-tier Brut NV. Nevertheless, the quality is there in these methode champenoise sparklers produced by a family (the Gruets) that transplanted itself from Champagne to New Mexico.

#### GRUET Brut, New Mexico, NV

12x750ml \$13.49 \$151.96

Tech: 12% Alc. A blend of 75% Chardonnay and 25% Pinot Noir aged 24 months en tirage (on the yeasts) and dosed at a true Brut level (0.8% residual sugar). Straw colored, bright and clear and quite sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and a very light phenolic impression. Yeasty-minerally-toasty. Smooth and balanced with a fine rich feel. Lively with lemon and apple fruit and good spice. *Long and Delicious. Excellent. BS: 91VHR.*

#### GRUET Rosé Sparkling, New Mexico, NV

12x750ml \$13.49 \$151.96

Tech: 12.0% Alc. This 100% Pinot Noir (5% Red Pinot Noir for color) spends 24 months en tirage before getting a true Brut dosage for 0.8% residual sugar. Pale pink in color, bright and clear; medium full bodied, with a fresh acidity and light phenolics. Toasty and packed with red fruit with just enough citrus, this is juicy and alive with a lovely feel in the mouth. Long and satisfying but still refreshing. *Great food fizz. Excellent. BS: 91. VHR*

### OREGON ARGYLE

Argyle started as an effort to come close in the US to the cool climate of Champagne and Burgundy. The cooler parts of Oregon get as close as anywhere in the US. These two Oregon bubblys are not as far off the beaten path as Gruet, but great sparkling is not even in the top four wines you think of when you hear "Oregon." Given a few more vintages, Argyle may change that.

#### ARGYLE Brut, Willamette Valley - Oregon, 2005

12x750ml \$24.38 \$274.50

Tech: 12.5% Alc. 65% Pinot Noir and 35% Chardonnay from the Lone Star, Stoller and Knudsen Vineyards (the winery believes that this is the first new world sparkling to use Dijon clones), partial barrel and malo-lactic. Straw in color, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity. Offers lively but developed citrus and mixed fruit (some red) with lots of toast, some minerally dusty earth, and accents of spice and dark flowers. *Very long finish. Complete, integrated, delicious. Excellent. BS: 92HR.*

#### ARGYLE Brut Rosé, Dundee Hills - Willamette Valley - Oregon, 2006

6x750ml \$45.81 \$257.96

Tech: 12% Alc. 65% Pinot Meunier and 35% Pinot Noir, all from the Knudsen Vineyard aged 2.5 years on sur-lie. Its 1.8% residual sugar dosage puts it right on the borderline for Brut. Pale-red-orange in color, bright and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics. Lively red fruit accented with toasty yeast. Rich with minerally-earthy-dusty terroir. Accents of cocoa and black pepper. Very long finish. Complete and delicious with more than a little red wine character. *Excellent. BS: 91.*

### VALUE IN CHAMPAGNE

At the 2009 VinExpo trade fair in Bordeaux, we set our sites on Pannier as a real French Champagne we could sell (at very low margins) at \$20.00 per bottle. That was when the Euro was a bit over \$1.30. It is now over 1.50 and so has torpedoed our desired price point. Nevertheless, Pannier Brut tradition is an exceptionally good bargain-basement Champagne from one of the region's best co-ops. There're doing it right and at the right price.

#### PANNIER Brut Tradition, Champagne, NV

6x750ml \$23.74 \$132.42

Tech: 12% Alc. A blend of 40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 30% Pinot Meunier with 25% Reserve wines all from a high quality co-op that buys no sur lattes. Pale straw in color, day bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with crisp acidity and a very light phenolic note. Spicy, lively, bright, ripe, citrus with a note of red fruit along with minerally-chalky-earth terroir; subtle accents of toast. *Very long finish. Fine, fresh, focused; bright and alive-in-the-mouth. Really Fine. BS: 90+VHR.*

### LESSER KNOWN BUT "BETTER" BUBBLIES

Demoiselle Champagne is a marque owned by Vranken-Pommery but treated as a separate brand with its own separate production facilities and vineyards. Each of the Demoiselle wines comes in a unique proprietary bottle proving it was made by Demoiselle. The reason we carry these wines is they are authentic and delicious expressions of both Champagne and a legitimate Chardonnay-dominant house style. The wines are different than the Vranken or Pommery wines. Due to a large purchase, we have been able to lower the prices on the Demoiselle Brut Tete de Cuvée and the Demoiselle Grand Cuvée Rosé while we were also able to bring in some alternate sizes (also very well priced) and the exceptional mature luxury cuvée Demoiselle Brut Millesime 1er cru 1996.

#### DEMOISELLE Brut "Tete de Cuvée", Champagne, NV

12x750ml \$39.88 \$449.16

6x1.5L \$81.90 \$461.16

24x375ml \$19.98 \$450.03

24x187ml \$10.60 \$238.63

This is Demoiselle's basic Brut NV but as my note notes, it is much better than "basic." Tech Note: 12% Alcohol. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir fermented using Methode Champenoise with 36 months aging on the yeast. Straw in color, bright, clear and sparkling. Offers refreshing acidity under white and yellow citrus and tree fruit (lemon and green apple fruit with hint of peach), clean toasty yeast notes, and dusty-minerally terroir. It is long, lively, and refreshing with a clean finish. Elegant, fresh, and focused; alive-in-the-mouth. *Excellent. BS: 91+VHR.*

continues on pg 4

*Go-To Bubbles To Go from page 3*

**DEMOISELLE Brut Grand Cuvée Rose, Champagne, NV**

**12x750ml \$48.75 \$549.00**  
**24x187ml \$13.99 \$315.05**

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir de Bouzy produced using Methode Champenoise and aged 36 months on the lees (the rosé color comes from a small percentage of the Pinot Noir being made as a red wine and added to the blend just before the "Champenization"). Pale salmon - onion skin in color, bright and clear and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and a long, refreshing finish. Earthy with chalk and darker earth. The fruit is in the red cherry and citrus range with grace notes of black pepper and plenty of toasty yeast. Elegant and integrated, satisfying; lovely-in-the-mouth. Almost exotic and quite delicious. Rich and rounded with the balance to go with food but all-the-while retaining its elegance. *Excellent. BS: 92.*

**DEMOISELLE Brut Millesime 1er cru, Champagne, 1996**

**12x750ml \$89.99 \$1,013.38**

This is the Demoiselle luxury cuvee. We tasted both this 1996 and the 2000 and chose the 1996 because of its extra development and richness. The 2000 is also excellent and we will likely carry it at some point after the 1996 is sold out. It is just that the 1996 is a rare find that is drinking beautifully. Tech: 12% Alcohol. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir exclusively from premier cru vineyards fermented using Methode Champenoise and aged 60 months on the yeasts. Straw in color with a hint of gold, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics. Offers developed fruit and toasty bread that is very well integrated with the chalky mineral component. Very long finish. Satisfying, complete, and delicious; lovely-in-the-mouth. Richer and quite developed with pure, precise, almost smokey flavors. If you have never tasted a great Champagne with more than ten year's aging, this is a beautiful one to try. *Really Excellent. BS: 95+.*

*Champagne Henriot* is owned and managed by Joseph Henriot. He is the man who, as chairman, built Veuve Clicquot into the commercial success it now is. He also bought and resurrected both the quality and reputation of storied Burgundy Negociant Bouchard Pere et Fils. On leaving LVMH (the parent company of Clicquot), Joseph Henriot has taken on the task of reawakening the sleeping house of Henriot, his family's legacy marque in Champagne. Choosing the path of quality and operating as the Champagne insider that he is, Henriot has built the marque from the bottom up with solid Brut NV and Brut Rosé.

**HENRIOT Brut Souverain, Champagne, NV**

**12x750ml \$38.99 \$439.05**

Tech: 12% Alc. 40% Chardonnay (Cote de Blancs) and 60% Pinot Noir (Montagne de Reims). Rich straw color, bright and clear with a fine bead; dry, medium-bodied with crisp acidity; very light phenolics and a mineral chalk finish. Juicy, crisp, refreshing, toasty with lemony ripe citrus accented with yeast and mineral flavors. Long and focused; elegant bubbly. *Really Fine. BS: 91.*

**HENRIOT Brut Rose, Champagne, NV**

**12x750ml \$41.60 \$468.48**

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 58% Pinot Noir and 42% Chardonnay, the color comes from a small amount of red still Pinot Noir. Pink tinted-copper in color, bright and clear; medium full-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics, and a mineral chalky finish. Toasty, earthy, red fruit with citrus, yeast, and mineral. Rich and food friendly. Really lasts with distinct vinous red wine character. *Excellent. BS: 92.*



*Pierre Morlet* is a small family owned negociant Champagne house operating more like a Recoltant Manipulant. The Morlet family vineyards are comprised of over thirty parcels totaling forty acres in Avenay-Val-d'Or (Premier Cru), Ay (Grand Cru), Bisseuil (Premier Cru), and Mutigny (Premier Cru). These vineyard blocks are situated next to parcels that produce the super premium cuvées for such famous Champagne houses as Bollinger, Krug, Moët & Chandon, Mumm, Pommery, and Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin. In Ay, the prestigious vineyard La Côte aux Enfants of Bollinger, is adjacent to the Morlet family's Gilbertin. Morlet operates as a negociant because the do buy some grapes to supplement their own production. According to the family, they buy no wine, only grapes.

**PIERRE MORLET Brut Grand Reserve, Champagne, NV**

**12x750ml \$38.99 \$439.20**

Tech: 12% Alcohol. A blend of 74% Pinot Noir and 26% Chardonnay with components from the Morlet family's terroirs of Premiers Crus Avenay-Val-d'Or, Bisseuil and Mutigny and of Grand Cru Ay, it is partially fermented in French oak "demi-muids" (500-liter barrels). Yellow straw in color, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with balanced acidity. Yeasty-biscuity with developed citrusy fruit and mineral earth. Very long finish. Complete, satisfying, delicious; rich and lovely in the mouth. *Excellent. BS: 92.*

**PIERRE MORLET Rosé Grand Reserve, Champagne, NV**

**12x750ml \$43.23 \$86.78**

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 100% Pinot Rosé obtained by saignée given a minimum of three years of "sur lie" aging in the deep caves before being disgorged and dosed three months prior to shipping. Pale pink with a note of orange, bright and sparkling; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and very light phenolics. Juicy, ripe, toasty, and yeasty offering citrus, strawberry, cherry, apple, and lemon with dusty-minerally-limestone earth. Hints at chocolate, red flowers, and just a touch of black pepper. Very long lively finish. Delicious, precise, quite satisfying; supple and alive. Super food Champagne offering richness and complexity along with fine flavor. *Quite Excellent. BS: 94.*

**FARMER FIZZ**

Or more properly "Growers Estate-Bottled Champagne" Farmer Fizz is a sort of flippant name for the fast growing but still relative drop-in-the-bucket (less than 2.5% of the total Champagne market in the US) category of Grower's Estate-Bottled Champagnes. Unlike almost all the wines produced by the Champagne houses of wide international fame, these necessarily small production wines usually reflect the distinct character or terroir of the village (or at most a few neighboring villages) where the individual grower has his vines.

These are decidedly non-commercial (in whatever sense of the word), artisanal, sometimes highly idiosyncratic wines that offer an uncommon sense of place (site-specificity) in Champagne.

At their best, grower Champagnes are skillfully made wines from clearly delineated terroirs (often premiere cru and/or grand cru vineyards) with great flavor, focus, and balance that often offer a superior bang-for-the-buck as the producers are all too small to need to build-in big marketing budgets. The dark side of Farmer Fizz is that not all terroirs are worthy, not all the winemakers are skilled, idiosyncrasy is sometimes just weirdness, and artisanship can degenerate into affectation.

There are only two real problems with the general category of grower champagnes: supply and dosage. Production of these estate-bottled wines is necessarily small and sometimes miniscule as these are farmer-winemaker operations which by nature are "hands-on". There is no rule that says a bigger house can't buy lots of vineyards and go estate-bottled but no one is doing that. The other potential problem with grower champagnes has been a tendency on the part of many of the grower/producers toward finishing the wines too dry as Extra Brut (extreme minimal dosage) or Brut Nature (no dosage) which often takes them out of balance until they have several years of aging. Happily, this seems to be abating and many of the wines are now being finished at more traditional but still dry (0.7 to 1.1 percent residual sugar) Brut dosage levels.

continues on page 5

*Go-To Bubbles To Go from page 4*

Here is a selection of the many "estate-bottled" Champagne wines Spec's carries.

**ROGER COULON Grande Réserve Brut 1er Cru, Champagne, NV**  
12x750ml \$54.99 \$620.59

Tech: 12% Alcohol. A blend of 34% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, and 33% Pinot Meunier, all from organically grown old vines; wild yeast ferment with 5 years on lees (6g dosage); only 250 cases produced. Yellow straw in color, day bright and clear; dry, medium-bodied, crisp acidity and very light phenolics with a mineral chalk note. Fresh, bright, lively. Notes of red fruit and citrus with a very nice toasty-yeasty component. *Excellent. BS: 92+.*

**LANCELOT ROYER "Cuvee RR" Brut Blanc de Blancs, Champagne, NV,**  
12x750ml \$40.30 \$453.84

Tech: 12% Alc. 100% Chardonnay from the estate's vineyards in and around Cramant in the Cote de Blancs. Straw in color, with green and yellow highlights. bright, clear and sparkling; dry, medium light-bodied with fresh acidity; very light phenolics. Offers citrusy fruit with chalky children's vitamins mineral notes; long refreshing clean finish. Fresh and yeasty; bright with citrusy fruit. Exactly as expected: toasty and delicious. *Excellent. BS: 93.*

**LANCELOT ROYER "Cuvee des Chevaliers" Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Cramant, Champagne, NV**  
12x750ml \$47.98 \$540.36

Tech: 12% Alc. 100% Chardonnay all from Grand Cru vineyards in Cramant in the Cote de Blancs. Straw in color, bright and clear and fully sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with crisp acidity. Fresh but ripe mixed citrus with a hint of tree fruit accented with chalky children's vitamins mineral terroir; long clean, fresh finish. This is a toasty, yeasty, focused, rich Champagne offering citrus and spice. Classic Chardonnay bubbles. Long and alive in the mouth. *Excellent. BS: 94+.*

**JOSE DHONDT Blanc de Blancs, Champagne, NV**  
12x750ml \$47.14 \$441.48

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 100% Chardonnay grown in the Cote de Blancs Chalk, 25-45 year vines trained on three canes, no ML. Straw in color, day bright and clear with plenty of bubbles; medium-light-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolic note. Dusty-minerally, spicy, fresh Champagne with lemon and tree fruit and lots of toast and terroir. Long and precisely focused; quite delicious.. *Excellent. BS: 93. ■*

## MAKE IT PERSONAL!



Give them a personalized engraved bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue, deeply engraved for a long-lasting impression! (and you don't have to tell them that you saved \$40 with your Spec's Key on your purchase of Johnnie Walker Blue scotch!)

**Spec's Smith St. Superstore**

**Wednesday 30, 5pm-8pm**

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# SPEC'S Events & Classes

The Wine School at l'Alliance Française presents

## WINE 101: A Four-Week Course on Wine Basics

Please join Spec's fine wine buyer Bear Dalton for this new four-week Wine Basics course. Wine 101 is focused both for those either just developing their interest in wine and for those who feel the need for a good review to help organize their tasting and thinking about wine. This class also would be a good place to start for a service professional looking to move more into the wine side of the restaurant business or anyone looking to move into the wholesale or retail wine trade. As wine from all over the world is now so readily available, the 40 wines we will taste over the four week class will come from all over the world.

Week 1 (1/5/10): Starting at the beginning: The basics of tasting. Tasting wine versus drinking wine. Types of tasting. Blind tasting. Playing "The Options Game". Ten wines will be tasted. Additional topics will include proper glassware, wine tools, and the restaurant wine ritual.

Week 2 (1/12/10): White wine making and white wine varieties and styles. We will taste ten white wines including Chardonnay with & without oak, off-dry whites, and sweet dessert wine. Topics will include how grape growing and winemaking affect wine style and flavors and how the types of wine represented by those tasted pair with food. We also will talk about wine storage and wine preservation and the concept of terroir.

Week 3 (1/19/10): Red and Rosé wine making and red wine varieties. We will taste ten red wines representing a range of styles and varieties including a new world versus old world comparison. Topics will include how grape growing and winemaking affect wine style and flavors and how the types of wine represented by those tasted pair with food. We also will talk about age-ability and age-worthiness as well as wine keeping and wine collecting.

Week 4 (1/26/10): Fortified wines (focusing on Port & Sherry) and Sparkling Wines (ranging from the Charmat bulk process wines – such as Prosecco – to real French Champagne. We will discuss grape varieties, styles, techniques and their impact on flavor. We will discuss decanting and decanters and pairing these unusual partners with food.

The four-week Wine 101 will cost \$200 total per person cash (\$210.53 regular) for all four sessions. The course will meet at 7pm on Tuesday January 5, January 12, January 19, and January 26 of 2010. To reserve your spot for this unique four week class, please contact Jessica Toner at 832-660-0250 or Jessica.Toner@specsonline.com. All sessions of this class will be held at l'Alliance Française, the French cultural center in Houston. Located at 427 Lovett Blvd., l'Alliance is on the southeast corner of Lovett and Whitney (one block south of Westheimer and two blocks east of Montrose).

### WINE SCHOOL CANCELLATION POLICY

To cancel a reservation, please call Jessica Toner at 832-660-0250 as soon as possible. Reservations canceled before 4pm on the last business day before the event will not be charged. Late cancellations may be charged. No-shows will be charged.

**l'Alliance Francaise is located at 427 Lovett Blvd. (on the Southeast corner of Lovett and Whitney, one block south of Westheimer, three blocks east of Montrose).**