

# BLIND TASTING

with Deborah Parker Wong

PHOTO: DEBORAH PARKER WONG



CIVC Director of Communications Thibaut Le Mailloux (left) and Sam Heitner, who directs the Champagne Bureau USA, at San Francisco's Prospect restaurant.

# Non-Vintage Champagnes

ROSÉ AND RIPER STYLES ARE TRENDING

## BOTH THE FRENCH AND THE BRITS ARE DRINKING

less Champagne, but America's obsession with bubbles is growing. Sales of Champagne in the U.S. are on the uptick even as consumers look to Prosecco and Cava to add some additional sparkle to their lives. When the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC) came to town last year with a large, well-orchestrated tasting at the Fairmont Hotel, Blind Tasting focused on the Réserve non-vintage wines; the bread-and-butter category that makes up 81% of all Champagne imports to the U.S.

During a briefing at Prospect restaurant, Washington, D.C.-based Sam Heitner who directs the Champagne Bureau USA pointed to rosé as a significant trend; "It's the fastest growing segment of Champagne in the U.S. making up 16.2% (that's 2.9 million bottles) of all shipments." The CIVC reports that in 2013 Americans drank 17.85 million bottles of Champagne, most of which, 87%, was produced by houses, with winegrowers and co-ops exporting just 13% of their production to the U.S.

When asked if more producers in addition to Möet & Chandon have begun lowering the levels of dosage for wines headed to the U.S., Thibaut Le Mailloux, Director of Communications for CIVC, agreed—although without citing specific producers—that levels of dosage are being reduced and pointed to several factors including a combination of climate variation, winegrowing practices producing riper grapes and the evolving palate of American consumers, "The popularity of dry rosé is an indication that consumers are moving in that direction," he said. To his point, more tropical fruit aromas and flavors and less than high levels of acidity were noted in many of the wines.

Of the 33 or so non-vintage wines offered by the 37 producers present at the tasting, the majority showed extremely well with only a few wines not rating a second look. The category as a whole and prestige and vintage cuvées in particular

get a boost as consumers start trading up for the holidays, but according to Heitner, only six to seven percent of imports are prestige cuvées. On the potential revision of the boundaries of the Champagne AOP, Mailloux noted that the INAO has 40 villages to reconfigure, a task that he doesn't predict being completed before 2025.

1. Liquid minerals, savory, yeasty with focused red apple flavors. 40% Pinot Meunier, 30% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay.
2. Toasty with rich lemon and red fruit flavors, lengthy, drying finish. Blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.
3. Floral, exotic aromas, fleshy almost fat flavors with less acidity. 60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir.
4. Toasty, tropical fruit mid-palate, medium plus acidity and medium finish. 35% Pinot Noir, 35% Pinot Meunier, 30% Chardonnay.
5. Red apple, chalky minerality, very crisp with medium finish. 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir.
6. Floral with delicate, exotic tropical fruit through the finish. 50% Pinot Noir, 25% Pinot Meunier, 25% Chardonnay.
7. Baked apple aromas, red berries, earth, baking spice, crisp and dry. 40% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Meunier, 40% Pinot Noir, 10% Pinot Noir still wine.
8. Strawberries, crisp, lean, very low atmosphere. 58% Chardonnay, 38% Pinot Noir, 7% still red wine.
9. Lemony, toasty, green apples and stone fruit, precise. 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay.
10. Earthy minerality, notes of petrol medium across the board. 35% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir, 15% Pinot Meunier.
11. Quite aromas, expressive white fruit, crisp, bright and lengthy. 60% Pinot Noir/Meunier, 40% Chardonnay.

**THE REVEAL:** 1. Billecart-Salmon Brut Réserve NV, \$45; 2. Canard-Duchêne Authentic Brut NV, \$50; 3. Champagne Charles Ellner Réserve Brut NV, \$25; 4. Charles Heidsieck Brut Réserve, \$65; 5. Comtes De Dampierre Cuvée des Ambassadeurs Brut NV, \$45; 6. Champagne de Venoge Brut Cordon Bleu, \$50; 7. Champagne Charles Ellner Réserve Brut NV, \$25; 8. Gossé Grand Rosé Brut, \$75; 9. Champagne Henriot Souverain NV, \$35; 10. Champagne Black Label NV, \$45; 11. Ployez-Jacquemart Extra Quality Brut, \$42.