



The International Wine Review

November/December 2015

Report #53: American Sparkling Wine

Introduction



North American sparkling wine has come of age. Many skilled winemakers are producing elegant sparkling wines inspired by the rich fruit of the New World. These wines are not easy to make. They require extensive experience on the part of the winemaker, who must make numerous critical decisions that affect the quality of the final product. In this, our 53rd report, we examine the

state of North American sparkling wine and evaluate the best sparkling wines made today in such disparate locations as New York's Finger Lakes, Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula, New Mexico's 4300' high mountain plateau, Santa Barbara's Sta. Rita Hills, Sonoma's Green Valley, Oregon's Willamette Valley, Virginia's Monticello, and Canada's Nova Scotia¹.

American sparkling wine was first made in Ohio but only garnered international fame when the sparkling wines of Northern California like Eclipse California and Korbel hit the market in the second half of the 19th century. Today, 90 percent of sparkling wine is made in California, but producers in several other states of the Union also make premium sparklers. About 25 of these wineries have a principal focus on sparkling wine.

This report focuses on the American sparkling wine story—how it came to be, who were the pioneers, how it is made,

In this Issue

Introduction	1
Acknowledgements	2
Top Rated American Sparkling Wines	3
The History of American Sparkling	4
The Grapes of the Sparkling Vineyard	7
Terroir and Viticulture	8
Making Sparkling Wine	10
Sparkling Wine Styles	12
Pairing Food and Sparkling Wine	13
Sparkling Wine Producers and Their Wines	15
Annex: Producers by Region	37

and who are the key producers today. To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive look at American sparkling wine, and for that reason we provide detailed producer profiles and reviews of their sparkling wine portfolios. Readers with particular interest in how sparkling wine and Champagne are made should consult one of our previous five reports on the topic, especially Report # 34 *Champagne Revisited*. The report includes only those wineries and wines made using the *methode champenoise*².

Continued on page 2

² French Champagne makers successfully lobbied the European Union to limit the use of the term *methode champenoise* as a wine descriptor to those sparkling wines made in Champagne; all other EU producers are prohibited from using the term. This restriction does not apply to producers located outside the EU, but many American producers now use the term *methode traditionnelle* or some equivalent term instead.

¹ The Annex gives a listing of producers by region.

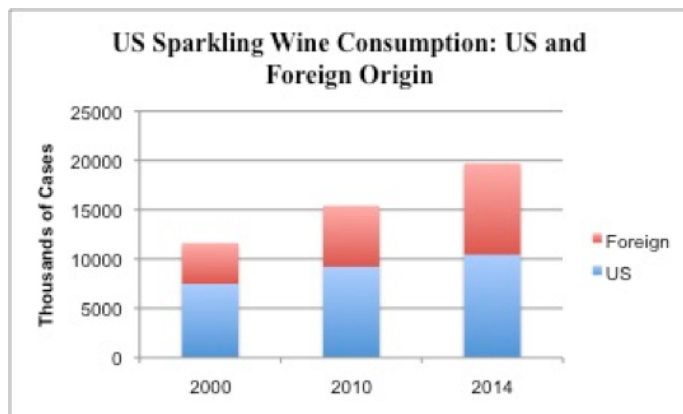
Introduction

Continued from page 1

There are many pioneers of American sparkling wine, foremost among them being Nicholas Longworth, who made America's first sparkling wine from the Catawba grape grown in Ohio. But Arpad Haraszthys is the father of modern sparkling wine made from Champagne varieties using the *methode champenoise*. Many others have followed in his shoes, most notably the Korbels, Jack Davies at Schramsberg, and Eileen Crane, who helped develop Gloria Ferrer, Domaine Chandon and Domaine Carneros in the Napa Valley. A recent band of sparkling wine pioneers are working in the most marginal growing areas.

While American sparkling wine was first made from American French hybrids, the *vitis vinifera* varieties of Champagne almost completely dominate the market today. A few Midwest wineries use newly improved hybrid strains, and a few wineries make sparkling wines from Rhone and German varieties, but they are the exceptions.

Foreign winemakers and investors have played an especially important role in the development of American sparkling wine. German immigrants had an important role early on both in California and New York. French winemakers like Moët & Chandon, Taittinger, Piper, Mumm, Deutz, and Roederer were especially influential during the sparkling boom of the 1970s and 1980s in California. Winemakers with Champagne-making experience like Michel Salgues, Claude Thibaut, Arnaud Weyrich, and Ludovic Dervin still play a prominent role.



The demand for all sparkling wine in the US market continues to grow, increasing by 70 percent between 2000 and 2014, significantly higher than the growth (40%) in still table wine over the same period. The US produced share of sparkling wine has slipped a bit, increasing 52 percent between 2000 and 2014, while foreign produced sparkling wine increased 123 percent over the same period. Much of the foreign growth was inexpensive, bulk processed Prosecco.

The future of American sparkling wine is bright. Stylistically, it shows rich New World fruit and a greater expression of varietal character than its French counterpart, and the top cuvées are elegant, refined, and superbly balanced.

Except for the prestige cuvées, prices are also modest. The principal risk today, at least for California sparklers, is the high prices wineries can receive for still wines made from the same grapes—Chardonnay and Pinot Noir—that go into the sparkling wines. Almost all the California wineries that were created as sparkling wine houses today also make significant amounts of still wines.

Acknowledgements. This report could not have been produced without the wonderful support and collaboration of many others. Of course, we thank the producers who so generously offered us their wines to taste. We also would like to express our gratitude to the many winemakers who spent time with us, either in person or in extended phone conversations, discussing how they make sparkling wine. Domaine Carneros' Eileen Crane, who spent an inordinate amount of time educating us, and Domaine Chandon's Tom Tiburzi, who led us on a blending exercise of the 2015 base wines, deserve extra special thanks. We also thank winemakers Jean-Benoit Deslaurier (Benjamin Bridge), Michel Salgues (Caraccioli), Eric Bauman (Chateau Frank), Norm Yost (Flying Goat), Mike Crumly (Gloria Ferrer), Mark Wenzel (Illinois Sparkling), Larry Mawby (L. Mawby), Ludovic Dervin (Mumm Napa), Chuck Harris (Ravenhurst), Claude Thibaut (Thibaut Jannison), and Jonathan Wheeler (Trump). We also express our appreciation to Charlie Palmer Restaurant in Washington DC and sommelier Nadine Brown for hosting a food and wine pairing luncheon of top American sparkling wines. Also, thanks to Janis MacDonald, Executive Director of the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association, for organizing a tasting of Anderson Valley sparkling wines.

Mike Potashnik and Don Winkler

The i-WineReview is published by the International Wine Review, LLC. Our office is located at 6625 Old Chesterbrook Road, McLean, VA 22101. Our email is: info@iwinereview.com Rates for one-year subscriptions are \$69 for the online edition and \$99 for 1 year combined online and print subscriptions. Commercial subscriptions are also available for \$149/year. Subscriptions include exclusive access to all online resources of iwinereview.com. Special group rates are available to wine clubs and wine schools. Contact us about eligibility and rates. Subscriptions may be purchased online at www.iwinereview.com Individual reports are also available for \$20. Reproduction of the material contained herein, including copying, without written permission is prohibited by law. Media, wine importers, distributors and retailers may use brief portions of this material in its original form if attributed to the International Wine Review.

Previous Wine Reports

Issue 1	California Petite Sirah
Issue 2	Red Table Wines of Portugal
Issue 3	Grenache Wines
Issue 4	Syrah
Issue 5	Malbec: Argentina's Magnificent Malbec
Issue 6	The Wines of Southern Italy: From Quantity to Quality
Special Report	Portugal: The Douro Boys and Barca Velha
Issue 7	New Zealand's Exciting Pinot Noirs
Issue 8	The Wines of Ribera del Duero
Issue 9	Champagne
Issue 10	Unoaked Chardonnay: It's More Than Wood
Issue 11	2005 Bordeaux Crus Bourgeois
Issue 12	California Petite Sirah - Syrah Update
Issue 13	The Wines of Rioja: Classical and New Wave
Special Report	Introduction to Sherry
Issue 14	The World of Sparkling Wines and Champagne
Issue 15	Wines of Chianti Classico
Issue 16	Oregon Pinot Noir
Issue 17	Sauvignon of the Loire
Issue 18	Wines of Navarra
Issue 19	Wines of Greece: Assyrtiko and Santorini
Issue 20	The Santa Lucia Highlands
Issue 21	The Chilean Wine Revolution
Issue 22	Grapes and Wines of the Western Loire
Issue 23	Ribera del Duero Revisited
Issue 24	The New Wines of Portugal Double Issue
Issue 25	The Wines of Austria
Issue 26	The Diverse Wines of Argentina Double Issue
Issue 27	Sweet and Dessert Wines of the World
Issue 28	The Wines of Priorat
Issue 29	The Wines of Monterey County
Issue 30	The Wines of South Africa Double Issue
Issue 31	Brunello di Montalcino
Issue 32	The New Wines of Israel
Issue 33	The Wines of Paso Robles
Issue 34	Champagne Revisited
Issue 35	The Wines of Soave
Special Report	South African Chenin Blanc
Issue 36	The Wines of Santa Barbara
Issue 37	The Wines of Sicily
Issue 38	The Wines of Washington State
Issue 39	The World of Grenache
Special Report	The Wines of Montefalco
Issue 40	Rosé Champagne and Sparkling Wine
Special Report	The Exciting Sparkling Wines of South Africa
Issue 41	The Amarones of Valpolicella
Issue 42	The Wines of Catalonia
Issue 43	The Wines of Rioja—A New Look
Issue 44	The Wines of Sonoma County
Issue 45	Virginia Wine Comes of Age
Issue 46	Special Report: The Best of Soave
Issue 47	Special Report: The Best of Tuscany
Issue 48	The Wines of Los Carneros
Issue 49	Special Report: The Best of Spain
Issue 50	The Wines of Chablis
Issue 51	Special Report: The Best Indigenous Wines of Sicily
Issue 52	Special Report: The Best of Sherry



i-winereview.com

These reports are available online at www.iwinereview.com