

A Sparkling Celebration

by Butch Steadman
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BUTCH'S PICKS:

BLANC DE BLANCS:

Café du Paris NV \$9.99

Saint Hilaire 2003 \$10.99

Schramsberg 2002 \$29.99

BLANC DE NOIRS:

Domaine Ste. Michelle NV
\$9.99

Domaine Chandon NV
\$16.99

Mumm Napa NV \$19.99

ROSÉ:

Jacob's Creek NV
\$9.99

Moet & Chandon NV
\$45.99

Veuve Clicquot NV
\$52.99

I don't know what you'll be drinking when the countdown to 2007 begins, but I know what will be in my hand. Nothing can take the place of a festive flute of bubbly to toast my family and friends as we ring in the New Year.

If there is ever an occasion that demands Champagne, for me it's New Year's Eve. As we reflect on how far we've come in the past year and envision where we are headed in the New Year, I plan to do so with several special sparkling bottles.

When selecting the perfect bubbly for your celebration, all the information needed is at your fingertips. The label reveals quite a bit including region of origin, level of dryness and style. Today, I'm focusing on the different styles of sparkling wine, which include *Blanc de Blancs*, *Blanc de Noirs* and *Rosé*.

Most Champagne is a blend of three main grapes: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. However, a *Blanc de Blancs*, which translates to white of whites, is made only from white grapes, therefore it is 100% Chardonnay. *Blanc de Blancs* is typically light in style, with delicate aromas and flavors and crisp acidity. It pairs well with lighter foods such as mild cheeses (goat cheese and brie), shellfish, vegetables, sushi, oysters, fish and it makes a great aperitif.

A *Blanc de Noirs*, which means white of blacks, is made solely from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier or a combination of the two. *Blanc de Noirs* is deeper in color and is usually more full-bodied than *Blanc de Blancs*. Pair this more flavorful Champagne with heavier foods including strong cheeses, veal, pork, chicken, venison and fruit desserts.

Rosé Champagne is more rare and can be expensive, particularly the top cuvees. Since the color of a wine comes from the grape skins, a rosé must include at least one of the two red grapes. Generally, adding a small amount of Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier juice to the white wine base makes a Rosé. Less often, the red wine skins are allowed brief contact with the colorless grape juice to create the pale pink color. This maceration process is more costly, so it is usually reserved for more expensive Vintage Champagne. Typically a lighter non-vintage Rosé will pair well with shellfish, pork and veal, while a more full-bodied vintage bubbly will compliment rich meat dishes like venison and duck and even chocolate.

As Champagne is the celebratory cocktail of choice, New Year's Eve is the ideal time to share your favorite bottle of bubbly with friends or perhaps discover a new one. So, pop a cork and raise your glass to 2007. Here's to a wonderful and prosperous New Year!

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