

Suggestions and curiosities on the best way to drink “spumanti”

On what occasion?

According to psychologists, sparkling wine is the most sociable of wines; others think it has magic powers to be exploited at significant moments. If bubbles can indeed have the power of seduction, a bottle improperly chosen or badly opened can spoil everything. So, in order not to dash your hopes on an important occasion, let's go over some elementary rules and suggestions!

Conservation

Once purchased, a bottle of sparkling wine (or bubble wine) should be kept for as short a time as possible. “Spumanti” is not a wine to be aged and, when it is on the store shelf, it is ready to be drunk. If you keep it for a few months, make sure the bottle is placed horizontally in a cool, dry place away from light and vibrations and the wine is always in contact with the cork.

Just before drinking it..

First, bring the bottle to the right serving temperature using a normal refrigerator unless you have a grotto at home! Sparkling wine must be served cold to make the most of its perlage, acidity and certain fragrances which emerge and balance only at low temperatures. You should bring it to 6 or 7 degrees centigrade to fully appreciate its characteristics and enhance the bouquet which too low a temperature would quench. Do avoid the 4 degrees recommended by James Bond for his Dom Perignon!

Sparkling wine likes neither being hurried nor sudden changes, so if you are late, do not cool it quickly by placing it in the freezer. Use a bucket with water and ice for emergencies. Ice cubes and rock salt in the bucket will take the bottle to temperature in a couple of minutes.

Uncorking.... without the “POP”

The classical well known “pop” should be avoided at the moment of uncorking – with a few exceptions. The wine violent impact with the atmosphere and the spilling of the foam diminish part of the perlage which keeps “spumante” alive. Avoid the sommelier's ceremonies (sniffing the cork before serving “spumante” could give a bad impression); the simple opening of the bottle of “spumante” will provide the expected touch of elegance and respect.

The best way to uncork the “vino spumante” is to remove the wire and the metal cap, then hold the cork firmly with one hand, keeping a thumb on top of it for security. With the other hand, hold the bottle fast at the bottom and turn it round just in one direction. If it was properly chilled, the opening will be easy, soundless, and the cork will remain in your hand. Now carefully turn the cork two times to avoid spilling the foam.

The glass: flute or goblet?

Different schools of thought endorse two different glass typologies for spumanti: the goblet and the flute. The first is considered more sensual and is generally used for sweet spumanti because of its wider shape which better expresses fragrances. The second one is more austere and is used for the other spumanti, because its elongated shape emphasizes the perlage and concentrates delicate fragrances.

For an older wine or one with a greater structure, you can use a rounder flute (tulip shaped) which better expresses the characteristics of a more evolved sparkling wine. The transparency of the glass is in any case fundamental; do not use coloured or stemless glasses!

Do not frost the flutes or goblets, as it would compromise the development of the perlage. The presence of any washing detergents can have the same effect, so be sure to rinse glasses carefully.

At the table

As for the matching of sparkling wine with food, we can say that each category of different “spumante” has its own best pairings.

For an aperitif you can serve light sparkling wines from single varietals of the Chardonnay or Riesling type or dry such as Prosecco from Conegliano-Valdobbiadene. With fish appetizers you can drink a light Charmat or a fragrant and delicate classic method or a still young Classese or an Altoatesino. Without setting fixed rules, you can also try a good Rosè or a Franciacorta with roast meat and game. Some Pinot Nero “different spumanti” vinified without skin are also excellent with meat and fish with sauces.

Our Chardonnay, “blanc de blanc”, is delicate and an excellent aperitif for seafood; its Queen could be an oyster!

The most structured products, the more mature and evolved different spumanti should be combined with the most persistent flavours: caviar, parmesan and salmon. With desserts a very important rule, which is sometimes ignored by the very restaurants, is NEVER but NEVER serve a dry sparkling wine with sweets. It is the best way to miss the best of both. From Extra Brut, Brut, Sec and demi-Sec up to the sweeter Asti Spumante, you can always find the one you need!

Soloist in the glass or in good company?

According to some, mixing “spumante” with other drinks is an insult; for others, it is a pleasant way to enjoy it: in fact, combining sparkling wine with other drinks in cocktails or long-drinks can even exalt some characteristics of the “bubble” wine.

The most famous of sparkling wine cocktails is the Bellini, whose fame and fortune teaches us how spumante combined with fruit juice is perfect for those who prefer a moderately alcoholic drink. Originally it was mainly requested by women, but now men are fond of this “soft” taste as well.

Mixing wine with fruit juices can provide a seasonal soft-drink, but carefully keep an adequate emphasis on the “fizz” as one of the salient essentials of bubble wine.

A warning: do not use whisks or other beaters to mix the wine and avoid producing foam, as this practice spoils the natural characteristics of bubble wine-spumante.

Which spumante?

There are many types of “vini spumanti”, so in order to choose the right wine for a particular food or occasion, a knowledgeable reading of the label is required to identify the different characteristics of the product. Being able to recognize the meaning of the different terms reported on the label will prevent an unpleasant surprise on opening the bottle.

Among the “criteria”, one of the most important for the palate is sweetness, which is expressed in terms of “residual sugar”. Depending on the different grades of residual sugar, the bubble wine will report on the label one of the following definitions:

EXTRA BRUT

Sugar included between 0 and 6 grams/litre.

These are the truly dry wines, which include the “pas-dosé” (“non dosato” or “dosage zero”), a denomination which is not provided for by law but is found on the label; this means that the wine has not had any “liqueur d’expédition” added, so that it does not have a higher grade of sugar than the base wine.

BRUT

Sugar less than 15 grams/litre. It is dry, but reasonably so.

EXTRA DRY

Sugar content between 12 and 20 grams/litre. It shows a soft light vein. Many Superiore di Cartizze Valdobbiadene Docg Spumante are truly dry.

SEC, SECCO, ASCIUTTO OR DRY

Sugar content between 17 and 35 grams/litre. These sparkling wine Valdobbiadene Conegliano Asolo Docg or Prosecco Doc are “on the vein” and have a discreet sweet note which, in some cases, brings out a certain intensity.

DEMI-SEC, ABBOCCATO, MEDIUM DRY

Sugar content between 35 and 50 grams/litre. This is a dessert wine – not too sweet but certainly “sweetish”.

DOLCE, SWEET

Sugar content over 50 grams/litre. These are truly sweet wines. They are generally produced from aromatic grapes such as moscato or malvasia or Asti Docg.

Sometimes instead of the terms listed above, you can find the sugar content directly expressed in gram/litre on the label.

Type of bubble wine	Residual sugar g/l
- Pas- Dosé	< 3
- Extra Brut	< 6
- Brut	< 15
- Extra Dry	12-20
- Sec, Secco, Asciutto o Dry	17-35
- Demi-sec o Abboccato, Medium Dry	35- 50

- Dolce/Sweet	> 50
---------------	------

And then...there is the size!

To create a real “wine event”, the French have invented a series of differently sized bottles suited to all occasions. So the choice ranges from the “birillo” which holds less than 200cl (two flutes of wine) to the “Nabuchodonosor” of...15 litres!

37,5 cl fill 4 large flutes, while the “magnum” is considered to be the ideal size for the maturation of the wine as well as the best size for a party.

These are the sizes you can choose from:

- “Quarto” (“birillo”) corresponds to 0.200 litres (1/4 bottle)
- “Demi” corresponds to 0.375 litres (1/2 bottle)
- “Champagnotta” corresponds to 0.750 litres (1 bottle)
- “Magnum” corresponds to 1.5 litres (2 bottles)
- ”Jéroboam” corresponds to 3 litres (4 bottles)
- “Réhoboam” corresponds to 4.5 litres (6 bottles)
- “Mathusalem” corresponds to 6 litres (8 bottles)
- “Salmanazar” corresponds to 9 litres (12 bottles)
- “Balthazar” corresponds to 12 litres (16 bottles)
- “Nabuchodonosor” corresponds to 15 litres (20 bottles)
- “Salomon” corresponds to 18 litres (24 bottles)
- “Primat” corresponds to 27 litres (36 bottles)
- “Melchizedec” corresponds to 30 litres (40 bottles)