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SPARKLING WINES

The Equinox Guide for Wine Professionals
and Connoisseurs



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Sparkling Rosé Wines

Light-bodied

At the lowest end of the category of light-bodied sparkling rosés are lightly coloured effervescent wines characterized by simplicity, their alcohol contents no higher than around 11% abv. A typical example is Paltrinieri Lambrusco di Sorbara DOC 'Radice', produced in the province of Modena in the Emilia-Romagna region (northern Italy). Produced from the grapes of Lambrusco Sorbara, this sparkling wine demonstrates refreshing aromas of grapefruit and wild strawberries, with hints of wild roses, green apple peel and pomegranate detectable on the palate. This flavour profile has earned this wine the reputation of an excellent companion to *antipasti*. The wine's fruity freshness can create pleasant contrasting pairings with the fatty and umami flavours of *prosciutto di Parma*, raw tuna or thin pieces of smoked salmon.

Another relatively light-bodied sparkling rosé wine is Chateau Chizay Carpathian Sekt Blaufränkisch Rosé Brut from the region of Zakarpattia (western Ukraine). With an alcohol concentration of 11.5% abv, a sugar content of 5.2 g/l and subtle aromas of peonies and roses, with delicate flavours of rose petals and sour cherries, this Charmat-method wine has been reported as creating an excellent congruent pairing with strawberries. Professional tasters at Chateau Chizay suggest that their wine could also pair well with tuna, halibut or grilled shrimps.

Made from the grapes of Xinomavro (98%) and Limniona (2%) in the region of Macedonia (northern Greece) using the traditional method, Karanika Cuvée Rosé Brut 2021 is a moderately structured light-bodied wine with an alcohol content of 11.5%. With a sugar content of 5 g/l, an acidity of 7.46 g/l and a low pH of 2.92,

this wine demonstrates good food-pairing potential. Delicate aromas of wild roses and raspberries, gentle yeasty characteristics gained from its storage in bottles on its lees for almost one-and-a-half years, along with its lively, mineral freshness with notes of citrus fruits on the finish, can make this wine a delectable accompaniment to grilled halloumi, a semi-hard cheese of Cypriot origin with a salty, lactic (and slightly minty) flavour, made from cow's, goat's and sheep's milk.

A light-bodied fully sparkling rosé with a little richer structure, Augustí Torelló Mata 'Celler Kripta' Trepas Cava Reserva Brut 2021 has been produced from the grapes of Trepas, macerated for eight hours. Matured in bottles on lees for upwards of 18 months and released with an alcohol concentration of 11.5% abv and 8 grams of sugar per litre, this cava reserva has developed aromas of strawberries and hay, with hints of toasted bread, as well as delicate and fresh flavour notes of citrus fruits, perceptible on the palate. According to both the producer and expert tasters, this wine combines well with foods exhibiting similar flavours, notably those with strawberries as the main ingredient. Fruit-driven, this wine is sometimes also considered an agreeable accompaniment to Iberian ham or the savoury, umami notes found in a number of Japanese dishes, including sushi and sashimi.

The group of light-weight sparkling rosés includes those with alcohol concentrations close to or even a little higher than 12% abv. One such wine is Gouguenheim Rosé de Malbec Extra Brut. Produced from Malbec grapes sourced from high-altitude vineyards of the Tupungato area, the northernmost subregion of Uco Valley (the western part of Argentina's wine-growing province of Mendoza), this wine has a flavour profile dominated by floral and

fruity notes, a result of using the standard tank method, which usually entails short contact with lees following the second fermentation process. This Charmat-method wine presents fresh aromas of wild cherries and strawberries, with its sugar content of 9.11 g/l, a pH of 3.3 and an alcohol concentration of 12.1% abv. The wine is typically served either on its own as a refreshing drink on a warm day or with fresh fruit salads and light finger foods, such as savoury canapés or spring rolls.

Another notable example among light-bodied wines with around 12% abv is provided by the French wine Calmel & Joseph Crémant de Limoux–Rosé Brut, made from 60% Chardonnay, 30% Chenin Blanc and 10% Pinot Noir, and released following 15 months of maturation in bottles in contact with lees. Dominated by flavour notes of ripe strawberries and raspberries, and tropical fruits, its profile appears to justify the suggestion offered by the producer's

tasters that this fruit-driven wine would not only make a suitable companion to fresh Bavarian cream with strawberries but also make for complementary pairings with salty flavours found in bacon or pretzels.

Trius Brut Rosé VQA Niagara Peninsula is a quality traditional-method sparkling wine from the Canadian province of Ontario, produced from the grapes of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Meunier and Gamay. Released with 12% abv and 8 g/l of sugar, following almost two years of maturation in bottles on lees, this wine has a refreshing acidity with notes of yeast, fresh bread, apples and citrus fruits, with a lingering finish cleansing the palate. Tasters at Trius Winery suggest that their sparkling rosé can make an optimal match for a range of foods, including vegetarian spring rolls, pan-fried perch or pickerel, roasted tomatoes served with goat cheese on lightly toasted baguette, and classic fondue (made with Emmentaler and Gruyère).



Photo 73. A light and fruity sparkling wine crafted in Sussex from the grapes of Pinot Noir and Meunier, The Bolney Estate Cuvée Rosé Brut 2018 has been matured in bottles on lees for 18 months. With an alcohol content of around 12.3% abv, 8.6 g/l of sugar and flavours of fresh flowers, red apples and cranberries, this vintage wine is known to match well with fruit-based desserts. Renowned wine writers Christopher and Oliver Walkey recommend pairing the wine with apple cakes.

Photo: author, October 2023

Medium-bodied

Medium-bodied sparkling rosés include pink-hued sparkling wines with alcohol content ranging from around 12% abv to almost 13% abv. The low alcohol concentrations in some of these wines are often compensated by their structure and concentration of flavourants, notably as a result of production methods, such as the choice of grapes, contact of base wines with wood, use of reserve wines when preparing cuvées, and extended maturation of sparkling wine on lees. An example is Wiston Estate South Downs Rosé NV, made from 40% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay and 30% Meunier, where reserve wines (dating back to 2008) constitute up to 30% of the final blend. Bottled in 2019, this wine has been kept on its lees for around 42 months to allow it to mature and take on both flavours and

structure. Released with an alcohol content of 12% abv, 8 g/l of sugar and a refreshing acidity, it is described as bursting with aromatic notes of rhubarb, sour cherries and redcurrants, with hints of wild roses and lemon zest, and a touch of hibiscus on the finish. Tasters at Wiston Estate recommend partnering it with shellfish, strawberries and cream, and lemon meringue pie.

Another quality traditional-method medium-bodied sparkling wine with an alcohol content no higher than 12% abv comes from Styria (southeastern Austria). Crafted using the grapes of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc, Harkamp 'Sol' Rosé Große Reserve 2016 has rested in bottles in contact with lees for around 55 months, developing a solid structure and a rich palette of flavours. Made in the *brut nature* style, this wine shows mineral acidity with flavour notes of grapefruit, brioche, mint and raspberry, and hints of wild cherries on the finish. The structure of this sparkling wine should make it a suitable companion to *Wiener schnitzel*, as well as some sophisticated dishes, such as roast venison with semolina dumplings stuffed with carrots, yellow beetroot, celeriac and crushed coriander seeds, topped with bits of fried smoked bacon.

Composed of around 70% Cabernet Franc and around 30% Pinot Noir, Langlois Crémant de Loire Brut Rosé NV is a traditional-method sparkling wine from the Loire Valley with an alcohol concentration of 12.5% abv, a sugar content of 14 g/l and a good acidity. The wine, which has matured for 18 months in bottles in contact with lees, exhibits an array of floral and fruit-forward characteristics, dominated by notes of raspberries, strawberries, redcurrants, pomegranate, and also sour cherries, with some perceptible hints of creamy yoghurt, vanilla and white pepper. While this sparkling wine

is typically recommended as an aperitif, it has also been reported as pairing well with red fruit desserts or roasted green vegetables (such as broccoli or green asparagus), especially when served with butter.

Lo Sparviere Franciacorta Rosé 'Monique', made exclusively from Pinot Noir — fermented partly in stainless steel and partly in oak — is a medium-bodied sparkling wine, matured in bottles on lees for more than two years and released with an alcohol content of 12.5% abv, 5 g/l of residual sugar, an acidity of 6 g/l and a pH of 3.18. With a fine solid creamy structure and flavour notes of rose water and red berry fruits, this wine is recommended by its producer (Azienda Agricola 'Lo Sparviere') as an apt, delectable companion not only to selected red berry fruits and charcuterie but also to rich, creamy vegetable dishes, notably *parmigiana di melanzane*, or main courses of red meat.

Kreglinger Rosé Brut 2018 is a traditional-method sparkling wine with an alcohol



Photo 74. Wine flavours carried by the Pinot Noir grapes evolve with age. The Pinot Noir component of a *cuvée* often shows notes of strawberries during the first several years of *sur lie* maturation taking place in the bottle. Matured in bottles on lees for between four and six years, Pinot Noir-based *cuvées* can exhibit notes of truffles, which tend to evolve into spicy flavours of ground black pepper if the wine is kept on lees for a longer period.

Photo: author, June 2020

content of 12.5% abv and 7.5 grams of sugar per litre. All the must intended for this wine was obtained from Pinot Noir grapes grown in northern Tasmania and fermented in used French oak, in which the new base wine was subsequently also allowed to mature for nine months prior to bottling. After its rest in bottles for four years in contact with lees, this sparkling wine boasts an exceptional creamy texture. Described as a quality wine with elegance, natural freshness and flavours of raspberries, strawberries and cherries, accompanied by notes of sweet spices and marzipan, this wine can create delectable multi-level pairings with both fresh sashimi with pickled ginger and smoked salmon on blinis with sour cream.

Full-bodied

Full-bodied sparkling rosé wines can be expected to have alcohol content higher than 13% abv. However, some sparkling rosés classified as full-bodied may have slightly lower alcohol content if they stand out for their high complexity and concentration of flavours. One example is the traditional-method wine Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta 'Annunziata Clementi' Rosé 2013, made from Pinot Noir grapes. Sourced from 33-year-old vines grown in the province of Brescia (northern Italy), the grapes were macerated briefly at 14°C and vinified in small oak barrels. New base wines intended for this wine were allowed to mature in oak for three years before being bottled. Stored in bottles on lees for eight years, this franciacorta has been released with an alcohol concentration of 12.8% abv, 1 g/l of sugar, an acidity of 5.8 g/l and a low pH of 3.03. This bottling boasts great complexity and depth, with flavours of wild strawberries, raspberries and citrus fruits, and hints of violets and pastry. This wine is viewed as a suitable match for

sophisticated dishes, for instance pumpkin risotto topped with Robiola cheese and thin layers of duck speck.

Jean-Michele Novelle 'Réserve Personnelle' Rosé de Noirs 2018 is a full-bodied traditional-method sparkling wine made exclusively from Pinot Noir grapes in the region of Genève (westernmost part of Switzerland, close to the French border). Released with 13.5% abv and 20 g/l of sugar, this wine has rested in bottles in contact with lees for around three years. It reveals a balance between sweet and sour flavours, with clear notes of sour cherries, raspberries and grapefruit. Jean-Michele Novelle's tasters suggest that their wine pairs best with *foie gras*, lamb tagine with prunes, and cherry pie. It is sometimes recommended as an accompaniment to toasted Raclette served alongside boiled potatoes and pickles, and *Älplermagronen*, a traditional dish from the Alpine regions of Switzerland, which requires six basic ingredients: potatoes, macaroni, cheese, onions, bacon and apple sauce. The juicy flavour profile of this wine, enhanced by its crisp acidity, can balance the rich and creamy texture of either of these two dishes.

A sparkling wine's ageing potential relies to a great extent on the format of the bottle in which the wine resides. Champagne Billecart-Salmon's chief winemaker Florent Nys suggests that his Billecart-Salmon Brut Réserve could benefit from ageing for up to two years if the wine is in a half-bottle (37.5 cl) and for over two to four years in a standard bottle (75 cl). He further recommends that connoisseurs that have purchased the wine in magnums (1.5-litre bottles) or jéroboams (3-litre bottles) age it for four to eight years.

Another notable example is Iron Horse Brut Rosé 2019, a traditional-method sparkling wine from Sonoma County's Russian River Valley. Crafted by Iron Horse Vineyards' winemaker David Munksgard using 62% Chardonnay and 38% Pinot Noir, and matured in bottles on lees for three-and-a-half years, this wine has been released with a sugar concentration of 5.4 g/l and an acidity of 7.3 g/l, with a low pH of 3.06. The wine shows aromas of ripe raspberries and dark cherries, and flavours of strawberries and limes. Tasters at Iron Horse Vineyards suggest that, balanced as it is, the wine could be served on its own as an aperitif or in a pairing with steak.

Among the most full-bodied sparkling rosé wines is the traditional-method House of Arras Vintage Rosé 2015. Made by Ed Carr from 61.7% Pinot Noir, 37.7% Chardonnay and 0.6% Meunier sourced from Tasmanian cool-climate vineyards, this wine has an alcohol content of 13.6% abv. Notably, 10% of the juice destined for this wine was fermented in new French oak barriques and the wine rested in bottles on lees for around six years. Released with 2.4 g/l of sugar, an acidity of 6.7 g/l and a pH of 3.17, it exhibits lifted aromas of raspberries, Turkish delight and lychee, and also seamlessly integrated flavours described as evoking maraschino cherries, dried blood orange and red berry yoghurt. Expert tasters from House of Arras propose pairing this complex wine with fresh seafoods, poultry and game meats. Its natural freshness has also been reported as offering a welcome contrast to the umami flavours of Flinders Island saltgrass lamb, braised or roasted, often previously marinated in olive oil, white wine and herbs, typically sage and rosemary. The salty and herbal elements of the dish offer a pleasant foil to the fruity components of the wine's bouquet.

Beckett 2015, 2023; Bredahl 2017; D'Agata 2024; Farrer *et al.* 2023; Hunt 2022; Hyland 2019; Johnson 2019; Lewis 2024; May 2021; McCarthy 2017; Poggio 2021; Sinclair [1998] 2008: 27, 269, 359; Walkey and Walkey 2022; Woodard 2023

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Sparkling Red Wines

Light-bodied

The category of light-bodied sparkling red wines is dominated by wines made in northern Italy and Canada. An illustrative example is the low-alcohol wine Giacomo Bologna 'Braida' Brachetto d'Acqui DOCG 2023, made in Piedmont (the northwestern part of Italy). This sweet vintage-dated wine, released with an alcohol content of 5.5% abv, over 120 g/l of sugar and a lively acidity of around 7.3 g/l, shows flavours reminiscent of ripe red fruit, violets and roses, hence pairing well with fresh strawberries and redcurrants, and also with a host of fruit-based desserts. It is also widely recommended as an accompaniment to Christmas panettone, jam tarts, hazelnuts, walnuts, pistachios and dried figs. With its fresh fruitiness, this wine is also sometimes considered as a suitable complement to the creamy taste of chocolate soufflés.

Vieni Rosso VQA Ontario is a non-vintage Charmat-method sparkling red wine made from the grapes of Cabernet

Franc and Chambourcin grown in Ontario (the southernmost province of Canada). The wine has been released with 10% abv and around 30 g/l of residual sugar. Fragrant and fruity, with distinct blackberry and mulberry flavours, hints of rhubarb and a touch of dried herbs, this wine could make an interesting pairing with roasted vegetables served with barbecue sauce. The sweet flavour features of this wine will correspond with the smoky-sweet flavour characteristics of the sauce, while balancing its tangy character. When the wine is partnered with barbecue sauce, its bright acidity also serves to cleanse and refresh the palate.

Another example of a light-bodied sparkling red wine is offered by Venturini Baldini, a wine-producing estate located in the province Reggio Emilia in the region Emilia-Romagna (northern Italy). Made from Lambrusco Montericco, the wine Venturini Baldini T.E.R.S. Ancestrale Lambrusco Emilia IGP has been released with 11% abv. Made in the *brut nature* style and stored in bottles in contact with lees for 18 months, this wine shows aromas of blackcurrants, raspberries and rhubarb, with pleasant freshness and well-integrated tannins. Tasters at Venturini Baldini suggest the wine should taste excellent with fried gnocchi and mortadella or tortellini in well-flavoured broth, or egg pasta with meat sauces, salami and Parmesan.

Medium-bodied

The lightest among the medium-bodied sparkling red wines are sparkling ice wines, the production of which remains overwhelmingly the preserve of Canadian winemakers, mainly those from the wine province of Ontario. Canadian sparkling red wines are usually made from the

grapes of Cabernet Franc. Noteworthy examples of these wines can be found in the portfolios of Inniskillin Niagara Estate Wines and Vieni Estates. Inniskillin Sparkling Cabernet Franc Icewine VQA Niagara Peninsula can be expected to have an alcohol concentration in the range of 9–10% abv and a sugar content from around 240–290 g/l. The vintage-dated wine Vieni Sparkling Cabernet Icewine VQA Vinemount Ridge Doux 2013, produced using 64% Cabernet Franc and 36% Cabernet Sauvignon, has been released with an alcohol content of 10% abv and 243.1 g/l of sugar. Each of these wines has a crisp acidity, but they differ slightly in their expression of flavours. The profile of the Inniskillin bottlings is dominated by aromas of cherries and strawberries, with flavours of cranberries, raspberries and rhubarb, which can be perceived as a justification for pairing these wines with flavours of chocolate and fresh red fruits. The Vieni wine shows aromas of blackberry and plums, with hints of *crème brûlée* and flavour notes of candied red apple, tamarind fruit and honey. The sommelier Edward Rasiulis considers it a delectable accompaniment to duck confit with apricot relish.

A non-vintage traditional-method sparkling red wine with a little more pronounced mouthfeel, Ridgeview Sparkling Red Reserve–Limited Edition has been made from the ripest Pinot Noir grapes sourced from vineyards in southern England. Around 15% of the base wine intended for this sparkling wine was allowed to mature in 10-year-old French oak barrels. Bottle-fermented, it has benefited from its 18-month contact with lees. Released with 12% abv, 6.8 g/l of sugar, an acidity of 7.1 g/l, and a pH of 3.19, the wine shows vibrant aromas of sour cherry blended with notes of vanilla. The