

# Here's to spring!



## Sparkling wine can be an affordable treat if you steer clear of Champagne

It's time to raise a glass to spring. It's just around the corner and, after those winter blues we all get at times, it's so nice to see the days getting longer and the sun warming things up rather than just shining down.

We have a tradition in my house we refer to as Sparkling Wine Friday. At least twice a month, we open a bottle of bubbles on a Friday after work just to toast the upcoming weekend and to put the work week that was behind us. No matter what the week was like – good, bad or indifferent – sparkling wine has a way of perking things up. Yes, I know, booze has that effect normally, but there's just something about a bottle of bubbles that puts a smile on your face like no other wine, beer or spirit can.

Some friends wonder how we can afford bubbles on a regular basis, so I'm going to let you in on our secret. Most people, when they think of sparkling wine, get stuck in the mind-rut of Champagne and, yes, Champagne has a way of pricing itself out of the weekly budget. But look around at all the other places putting sparkling wine into bottles: Chile, Canada, U.S.A., Argentina, Italy and Spain. Plus there's a whole other world of bubbles in France outside the borders of Champagne.



Michael Pinkus

If you look hard enough, long enough and in the right places, you can be enjoying sparkling wines any day of the week you wish ... and at a fraction of the cost of the expensive stuff from northern France.

So let's look at some of the bubbles available from our own backyard and a few from abroad – just to broaden the spectrum a bit.

I have been saying for years that the next big boon in Ontario wine will be sparkling wine, and I am starting to be rewarded for my Nostradamus moment. And while there are plenty of new producers jumping on board, you can't go wrong with the classics who were there from the beginning.

Two such wineries are Trius and Henry of Pelham. Both are making wonderful bubbles in both Brut and Rosé styles and both are expanding their offerings to include more premium bubbles. (I told you this thing is hot.) Newer players in the bubbles market are Featherstone, which recently introduced a Rosé to its line of

“Joy” sparkling, and Megalomaniac, whose under \$20 bubble is great for everyday and weekend get-togethers.

Another player to look for is Flat Rock Cellars. It fought to have an alternative crown cap closure on its bottles (same thing you find on a beer bottle). This winery makes it in two styles, both white in colour, but one has a little more sweetness in the finished wine.

Great acidity and freshness can be found for under \$25 in the Spark line of sparklings from Tawse. Finally, another great new bubbles producer is KEW Vineyards, which came right out of the gate with bubbles on its wine list and currently has four or five on offer.

If you're travelling around Ontario this summer, head east to Prince Edward County where bubbles are all the rage. Hinterland has set the bar high out there – because that's all they do – but other wineries like Huff, Lighthall and Rosehall Run are also showing what can be done in this province.

Moving on to sparkling wines outside Canadian borders, there are value bubbles available from many countries, and one of the best places is France itself. Outside of Champagne, sparkling wine is called

Crémant and every northerly region makes one, from Alsace to Burgundy and the Loire. One such value is Château D'Eternes from the Loire Valley, another is Domaine Rosier Cuvée Jean Phillippe from Limoux or the Veuve Ambal Grande Cuvée from Burgundy ... all these wines are made in the Champagne or traditional method, but because they fall outside the boundaries of Champagne, they don't commandeer the high prices.

Other countries making value-priced bubbles include Chile, Spain and Italy. In Spain it's called Cava, while in Italy it's Prosecco; Chile has yet to pick a name besides sparkling wine for its bubbles. All three regions will get bubbles into your glass for less than \$20 and in some cases \$15 – these are the wines for that casual celebration.

So let's raise a glass to spring. After a long, cold winter, nothing feels better than a glass of bubbles to celebrate. Cheers!

## SPARKLING WINES TO TRY

### ONTARIO

- Featherstone 2012 Joy Premium Cuvée Sparkling** (\$34.95 - #310334) – LCBO & Winery
- Featherstone 2014 Joy Premium Cuvée Sparkling** (\$29.95 - #450700) - LCBO & Winery
- Trius NV Brut** (\$27.95 - #284539) - LCBO / Winery & The Wine Shop locations
- Trius NV Brut Rosé** (\$29.95) – Winery & Wine Shop locations
- Tawse 2014 Spark Limestone Ridge Riesling** (\$20.20 - #370361) - LCBO & Winery
- Tawse NV Brut Sparkling** (\$25.25 - #384966) - LCBO & Winery
- Henry of Pelham Cuvée Catharine Brut** (\$29.95 - #217521) - LCBO & Winery
- Henry of Pelham Cuvée Catharine Brut Rosé** (\$29.95 - #217505) - LCBO & Winery

- Megalomaniac 2015 Sparkling Personality** (\$19.95 - #469007) - LCBO & Winery
- Château des Charmes NV Brut** (\$23.95 - #224766) - LCBO & Winery
- IMPORTED**
- Château D'Eternes, Saumur Brut, France** (\$11.75 - #429696) - LCBO
- Veuve Ambal Crémant de Bourgogne Grande Cuvee, France** (\$18.00 - #429688) - LCBO
- Cuvee Jean Philippe 2014 Blanquette de Limoux 2014, France** (\$14.95 #467217 - LCBO
- Cono Sur Sparkling Pinot Noir Rosé, Chile** (\$13.95 - #365205) - LCBO
- Freixenet Cordon Negro Brut Cava, Spain** (\$14.25 - #216945) - LCBO
- Bottega Petalo Il Vino Dell'Amore Moscato** (\$13.95 - #588780) - LCBO

Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada. Follow him on Twitter at @thegrapeguy.

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