



On the Vine

2018 sparkling review



the panel

Every fortnight, the Liquor Barons wine panel meets in the cellar of the Swanbourne store, to look through 30-40 wines. This is conducted totally masked, and is an exhaustive process. The wines are discussed after each bracket and all points are shared and recorded. In this way, the best wines are selected on their merits - not their labels - and are then presented to you each quarter.

Blissful bubbles

Sparkling wine has always been a celebratory drink, a wine for special occasions – marriages, divorces, birthdays, premierships, Christmas and New Year. Things have changed, prices are now more attractive and consumers understand that fizz is a versatile wine. It's an ideal aperitif, a food wine and not so bad at breakfast, elevenses or anytime during the day or night for that matter. Prosecco, which is mostly non-vintage, has made a large impact on our market, it's a lively fresh easy drinking bottle of bubbles and doesn't harm the bank balance and champagne itself retains an elevated image, at a more affordable price than it was a decade ago. While prosecco and non-vintage champagne are ready to drink on release, vintage champagne can be further matured. Here's a selection, from tastings of over a hundred wines, that we have hand-picked for your drinking enjoyment, it was a tough slog, but as the saying goes, someone's gotta do it.

Rod Properjohn.



Billecart-Salmon Brut Réserve Champagne (Fr)

A mid straw colour with green tinges, this has lifted aromatics of apple, stone fruit and yeastiness. The palate has bold flavour, good length and a minerality that adds to the balance and finish. Bready notes throughout enhance the intricacy that we look for in champagne. Very popular.

\$79.99 each in any six \$84.99 each

Louis Bouillot Blanc de Blancs Brut Crémant de Bourgogne (Fr)

It's French, it looks like Champagne and tastes a little like it, but it's not. The price is an indicator. It's made from white grapes (including chardonnay) grown in Burgundy and offers floral and citrus aromas and a flavourful palate of lemon, spice and cream with crisp acidity to finish. There's plenty of bubble and life in this. A terrific quaffer, an anytime wine.

\$24.99 each in any six \$26.99 each





Brown Brothers Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier (VIC)

A label that we have been drinking and selling with enthusiasm for years. Carefully sourced cool-area grapes add to the quality of this Aussie 'Méthode Traditionelle' sparkler and it shows as elegance and finesse. Toss in the full fruit of apple and peach and you have flavour, along with a creaminess of fine bubble and a finish of refreshing acidity.

\$19.99 each in any six \$22.99 each



Pommery Brut Royal Champagne (Fr)

Straw green in colour, this medium weighted wine has bundles of flavour with apple and peach, floral notes, a biscuity texture, minerality and good finishing acids. There are layers of taste sensations bundled up here in one harmonious package. A food champagne, serve with scallop or scampi in a light sauce. Well-priced.

\$54.99 each in any six \$59.99 each

Charles Heidsieck Brut Réserve Champagne (Fr)

Here's a champagne that generated lots of panel comment. It's a brilliant deep golden green colour, which indicates age. A very high 40% of older reserve wines added to the base wine provides the colour and also a rich toasty lushness without any oxidation whatsoever. It has wild fruits, freshly baked brioche, nuttiness and a rounded velvety palate. A great food wine.

\$94.99 each in any six \$109.99 each





Lallier Brut Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Champagne (Fr)

A chardonnay-only sparkler with refinement and delicacy. The wine is light with a lacy mousse, freshly baked brioche, stone fruit, a silky creaminess and extended length to a cleansing acid finish. Marvellous as a drink-alone aperitif or when serving with food, try it with the freshest of sashimi or sushi.

\$79.99 each in any six \$89.99 each



Veuve Clicquot 2008 Vintage Champagne (Fr)

From the stunning 2008 vintage this is a dazzler, the third vintage in the decade from Veuve, after 02 and 04. A small amount of this was aged in oak and this imparts a smoky, toasty complexity to the lemony and biscuity characters of the wine. The palate has tension and grip and is loaded with effervescence. For drinking now or better still, aging for a decade.

\$99.99 each

Sittella Grand Vintage 2013 Méthode Traditionelle (Pemb)

Winemaker Yuri Burns sources Pemberton hand-picked pinot noir and chardonnay for this 'Grand Vintage' sparkler and ages the wine for four years on lees before disgorging. The result is a subtle wine, straw in colour with a green tinge, lively fizz, beautifully balanced with creaminess, a fineness throughout the palate and good length. Great effort.

\$29.99 each in any six \$32.99 each





Villa Sandi il Fresco Prosecco (It)

Fermented in stainless steel tanks a second time to capture the bubbles, this has bundles of pear fruit and apples along with lively effervescence. The palate is desirably long and harnesses these fresh fruit characteristics along with a mineral texture and a soft citrus bite on the finish. Attractive as a cleansing drink or as a mixer in many cocktails.

\$17.99 each in any six \$19.99 each



Guerrieri Rizzardi Extra Dry Prosecco (It)

Italian Prosecco should be light, simple and tantalisingly fresh. This ticks those boxes. It also has a subtle funky yeastiness, which adds some intrigue. The bubble is fine, the length is pretty good and there is a little sweetness for balance. As always, drink this style soon, there's no point in aging it.

\$22.99 each in any six \$24.99 each

Natale Verga Prosecco (It)

From Veneto, a very light dry style of bubbles with a bright straw green colour and plenty of effervescence. It dances across the palate with lemony pith, honey and almond flavours and lasts until crispness cleans up on the finish. Makes an ideal quaffer in warmer weather. Chill to a cool six degrees.

\$19.99 each in any six \$22.99 each





Brown Brothers Sparkling Brut Rosé (VIC)

New wine from this stable and a cracker. A light salmon colour, it's fresh and lively with bubble, has hints of wild red berries, just-baked scones, almonds and subtle honey complexity and is long, crisp and dry on the palate. We will drink quite a bit of this during the summer months. Tremendous value.

\$19.99 each in any six \$22.99 each



Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé Champagne (Fr)

Although at the pointy end of pricing, pink champagne has its ardent supporters. This label is very consistent and is a captivating drink. A pale apricot colour with fine bead, it's elegant and fresh, long, complex, creamy and cleansing, with impeccable balance. Serve with blini and salmon gravlax for a great result. Totally seductive!

\$129.99 each in any six \$139.99 each

Seppelt Original Sparkling Shiraz (VIC)

A style that is unique to Australia. It's a medium sparkling red with a little sweetness and creaminess that sets it up perfectly for the lighter red meats we enjoy in the warmer months – duck, turkey, lamb, ham, guinea fowl and quail. It is best served slightly chilled, about 15 degrees is ideal and it can be aged further if not required now.

\$19.99 each in any six \$22.99 each



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