

POP THE CORK AND SAY, “BE MY VALENTINE”

By Hanna Lee, Hanna Lee Communications, www.womanforwinesense.org

Despite winter's chill, there's something around the corner that is certain to melt your heart. I'm talking about Valentine's Day, one of my favorite occasions. Since festive events seem incomplete without a good bottle of wine, I wondered which ones set the right mood for a romantic Valentine's Day dinner. Personally, I can think of no better way to celebrate love than with a bottle of bubbly! It works throughout the meal, from an aperitif all the way to the richest chocolate mousse dessert (or even a gift box of bon bons).

Of course, Champagne is a classic choice. However, many people think that it's synonymous with sparkling wine. In truth, only sparkling wines made in the Champagne region of France (not too far from Paris) can use this name. Other countries produce some delightful sparklers. Moreover, for people on a budget, many of these lesser-known effervescent alternatives offer tremendous bang for the buck and will make your celebratory evening with your spouse or sweetheart special.

I recommend Prosecco, a sparkling wine from the Veneto region in Italy. Prosecco is a fun and fruity wine, meant to be consumed young and fresh. Moreover, it's reasonably priced between \$10-\$20. Prosecco's bubbles are delicate, making it easy to drink. Besides, with an alcohol level typically less than 11%, you can enjoy a romantic evening without getting too inebriated. Unless, of course, that's your game plan.

Another bubbly that's a good value is Spain's Cava (meaning "cellar" in Spanish). Most come from the province

of Catalonia, home to Barcelona. These wines tend not to be very fruity. Instead, they are dry, with notes of citrus and minerals. Unlike Prosecco, some are aged and have a more complex flavor suggesting nuts and honey.

Think "pink!" Many people mistakenly think rosé sparkling wines are only for summer and are either too cheap or too sweet, but they are missing out on charming wines that are the perfect romantic mood setters. Regardless of their country of origin — France, the U.S. and Italy — these lovely wines are excellent aperitifs and are exceptionally food-friendly.

To find out how professional wine experts plan their own Valentine's Day dinners, I interviewed Anthony Giglio, a card-carrying sommelier, author and journalist for AM-New York, Boston Magazine, Chow, and Wine & Spirits Magazine. He has also written on food & wine for Esquire, Details, Worth, Food & Wine, New York Magazine, Time Out New York, Redbook and Marie Claire. Rizzoli/Universe recently published his new book, "Cocktails in New York."

HL: What kind of wine sets the mood for a romantic Valentine's Day dinner?

AG: Naturally, Champagne is the traditional choice for special occasions. I like the idea of drinking pink on Valentine's Day for obvious reasons, especially a rosé Champagne because of its beautiful salmon color. If I were to make a Kir Royale as an aperitif, I'd actually use a sparkling wine instead of a Champagne, such as a good Prosecco from Italy. Better to make mixed drinks with sparkling wine.

HL: Do you have any classic food and

wines pairings for Valentine's Day dinner?

AG: Champagne and oysters is a favorite of mine, as is demi-sec with foie gras.

HL: Do you have any recommendations for wines that pair well with a box of chocolates or a gooey, chocolaty dessert? Should it be a sweet dessert wine or are there dryer options?

AG: I don't like to complement sweets with sweet wine; it's overkill. I'm a big believer in Sherry with desserts. A sublime pairing is a fine amontillado Sherry with just about any chocolate, bitter or sweet. It's like liquid hazelnut in a bottle, crisp, dry and fruity.

HL: Do you have any suggestions for ordering wines to accompany a Valentine's Day dinner at a restaurant? What kinds of wines are most appropriate and affordable?

AG: It's ultimately up to the wine steward to steer you through this. He or she knows the food better than you do, and knows the wine list better than anyone. Be inquisitive and ask for pairing suggestions. Name your price and stick to it. Then let the night takes its course.

The Big Apple offers many fun wine events and promotions for Valentine's Day. You might want to check out Women for WineSense's Valentine's Day Wine Tasting on January 19, 2005. For more information on this non-profit wine education organization, please visit www.womenforwinesense.org. Despite the name, the organization is open to both men and women, so bring your significant other!

The following are brands you might want to consider for your Valentine's Day (Note: Prices are the suggested retail price and "NV" means Non-Vintage):

Champagne:

- Nicolas Feuillatte Brut, NV (\$25)
- Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial, NV (\$40)

Prosecco:

- Mionetto Sergio Extra Dry, NV (\$16)
- Pisani, NV (\$8)

Cava:

- Codorniu Cuvée Raventos Brut, NV (\$13)
- Freixenet Cordon Negro Brut, NV (\$7)

Rosé:

- Mionetto IL Rosé, NV, Italy (\$11)
- Nicolas Feuillatte Brut Rosé, NV, France (\$37)
- Chandon Blanc de Noirs, NV, California (\$17)

The following are several Manhattan wine stores with good sparkling wine selections:


- **67 Wine**
179 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10023
(212) 724-6767
- **Astor Wine & Liquor**
12 Astor Pl.
New York, NY 10003
(212) 674-7500
- **Ambassador Wine & Spirits**
1020 2nd Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 421-5078
- **Garnet Wines & Liquors**
929 Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10021
(212) 772-3211
- **Gotham Wines & Liquors**
2517 Broadway
New York, NY 10025
(212) 932-0990
- **Morrell**
1 Rockefeller Plaza, 49th Street
New York, NY 10020
(212) 981-1106
- **Spring Street Wine Shop**
187 Spring Street
New York, NY 10012
(212) 219-0521
- **Sherry-Lehmann Wine & Spirits**
679 Madison Avenue
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(212) 838-7500
- **Union Square Wines & Spirits**
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