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6 Bargain Champagnes

How to toast the new year without breaking the bank.

By [Ted Scheffler](#)

There are few things in this world I enjoy more than French Champagne—in particular, Salon le Mesnil (\$345), which is the boozy equivalent of a \$300-a-day smack habit. Sadly, my income doesn't afford me much French bubbly. Happily, there are lots of good bubbles to be had that don't cost the price of an iPad. If you're looking for some good deals on interesting sparkling wines for the holidays, here are a few suggestions—some wines you might not be familiar with, but are well worth your hard-earned coin.

Champagne from Germany? Are you nuts? Well, maybe. But for a mere \$7.99, I had to try Schloss Biebrich Sekt Trocken, made in Wiesbaden, Germany. You won't mistake this for actual Champagne, since that's typically made from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. This wine—not surprisingly, given its origin—is made from Riesling grapes. Also not surprising are the green-apple aromas that are de rigueur in Riesling. But there are also Champagne-like yeasty notes, some apricot, pear and apple flavors, and it finishes clean and dry (trocken means dry in German). You could do worse than to fill up your tub with this on New Year's Eve.

Another budget bubbly came to my attention via a local wine broker, who doesn't sell it but recommended Pink by Yellowglen (\$8.99). Perhaps Australian bubbles make more sense than German ones. Or, maybe not. But this is a fun, kicky wine that's perfect for parties—bachelorette parties, in particular. It's a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay that's light and brimming with strawberry and peach flavors, but also crisp, with good acidity. Despite what you might think looking at the bottle, it's not sweet. I could totally envision drinking Pink along with a pinkish slab of foie gras.

Speaking of pink, one of my very favorite bottles of pink bubbly is Gloria Ferrer Blanc de Noirs (\$17.99) from Sonoma. It's made from vibrant, hand-harvested Pinot Noir, along with a small amount of Vin Gris, which gives this sparkler its creaminess and rosy tint. It's a terrific, easy-drinking party wine, with hints of strawberry and black cherry, and a touch of marzipan on the palate. This California bubbly would pair wonderfully with crab, and I'd also take it for a spin with Thai food.

OK, if you think sparkling wine from Germany and Australia just seem wrong, what about New Mexico? Well, guess what? One of the best domestic sparklers I've tasted is Gruet Brut (\$15.99), from Albuquerque. And no, I haven't been dipping into the PCP. Will Pliier at the New Yorker Restaurant turned me on to this wine, which is made like Champagne, by a family who once produced Champagne in France, and tastes as if it should cost like Champagne. Try this: Buy a bottle of Gruet and blind taste it next to a glass of non-vintage French Champagne.

You're going to be stunned. I just saved you \$35. You're welcome.

It's from France, but it's not Champagne, since Simonnet-Febvre Crémant de Bourgogne Brut "Pinot Noir" (\$18.99) comes from Burgundy. Made from 100 percent Burgundian Pinot Noir averaging 20 years, this is a lovely, elegant sparkling wine for the price. It's made with exactly the same techniques as Champagne, and if it were made in Champagne it would undoubtedly sell for three times the price—creamy, toasty, delicate, delicious.

One of my favorite sommeliers tipped me to Soter Brut Rosé (\$37.99), which, he said, would cost \$100 if it were from Champagne rather than Oregon. Buy some. Drink it. You just saved 60-plus bucks. Happy New Year.



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