

Bigger and better

Tom Stevenson provides an insider's view of this year's Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships and announces the trophy winners

Launched in 2014, the first Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships (CSWWC) uniquely saw entries pour in from the most iconic Champagnes and sparkling wines in the world. Roederer Cristal Rosé 2002 walking away with the Supreme World Champion trophy.

Cristal's win last year should not, however, be taken as an indication that the CSWWC is an exclusively elitist competition. Of course we love to taste the world's greatest wines. Who doesn't? And there is nothing more satisfying, both intellectually and hedonistically, than demonstrating under the toughest of blind conditions that a famous wine deserves its great reputation. Nevertheless, we are just as eager to find the very best-value sparkling wines from every origin, style, and price point, as this year's results reveal.

We not only saw the return of most of the previous year's participants but also entries from 113 new producers, while the number of countries represented grew from 16 to 22. Consequently, we attracted 36 percent more medal-winning wines in 2015, making the CSWWC the most successful sparkling-wine competition on the planet.

There are a number of reasons why the CSWWC is so successful in attracting entries from serious sparkling-wine producers at all price levels in every nook and cranny.

- We offer a peerless combination of experience and consistency... The CSWWC is the only wine competition in which every wine is evaluated by every judge, and it is the only sparkling-wine competition where each of its three judges is one of the world's most experienced sparkling-wine tasters: Essi Avellan MW, Dr Tony Jordan, and yours truly. (This guarantees the same, highly experienced yardstick for all wines.)

- We taste blind by terroir... To evaluate the medals, the wines are tasted blind within the context of their own origin and style. (This is not unique to CSWWC, since it is also the crux of *Decanter* World Wine Awards, where I happily served as the Champagne chair for the first nine years.)

- We taste by Anglo-Aussie rules... Our rules have been taken from the best parts of the *Decanter* World Wine Awards, the International Wine Challenge, and the Australian wine-show system. In fact, Dr Tony Jordan is chair of the Australian Wine Show Technical Advisory Group, which has been tasked to draw up Best Practice Recommendations for the Australian wine-show system. In a nutshell, we taste in silence and solitude, give our scores, then discuss any wines where there is difference of opinion until there is a consensus, even if that consensus agrees to differ. (This is the antithesis of the sterile OIV rules that dictate the mechanical tasting regime of so many competitions under the umbrella of that organization.)

- We recognize only the best... Although every wine tasted is assessed as gold, silver, bronze, commended, or "no award," we publish the results of only gold- and silver-medal-winning wines, except for Deluxe Champagnes, which must win a gold to justify the premium they demand. (Telling consumers most of the wines entering a competition are winners to one degree or another diminishes the value of those awards.)

- We proactively protect clear-glass bottles... Since 2015, all wines in clear glass bottles are double-bagged in black plastic immediately as we receive them. (This reduced our quota of light-struck bottles by a staggering 94 percent compared to our first year, suggesting that most Champagne and other sparkling wines bottled in clear glass

leave their producers in pristine condition but quickly develop dimethyl disulfide, even when handled professionally for a relatively short time. Consumers beware: Always store clear bottles in the dark—DMDS takes just 60 minutes to build!)

- We eliminate bottle variation... If a wine is faulty, it is easy enough to call for a second bottle, but what about those wines that do not show a fault as such, just the effect of a fault such as the scalping of fruit in a bottle affected by a subliminal level of TCA? In every other competition in the world, such wines never achieve the score they truly deserve, but at the CSWWC, since 2015, we have a dedicated taster who opens up a second bottle of every wine that fails to make at least silver-medal grade (or gold in the case of Deluxe Champagnes) and compare it to the bottle that was judged. (Retasting 65 percent of wines entered into any competition represents an enormous logistical challenge, but bottle variation is one of the unspoken problems of wine judging and must be tackled.)

CSWWC 2015

We were very happy judging at Plumpton College in 2014. It specializes in sparkling wine and is the only educational facility in Europe offering a BSc for viticulture and enology in the English language. How much more appropriate can a fizz-judging venue be? We soon realized, however, that if the CSWWC became successful, we would quickly outgrow Plumpton's facilities, so the search was on for somewhere larger. We settled on Salomons Estate in Tunbridge Wells. Set in 36 acres (15ha) of gardens and parkland, this historic country house has the added advantage of being close to Sensible Wine Services (SWS), which handles our logistics. With its light and spacious Gold Room for tasting and the interconnecting Leighton Room for preparation, it was perfect for the job in 2015 and should be able to cope with future growth. With French windows leading to a terrace overlooking a lawn that sweeps down to a private lake, the Gold Room turned out to be the perfect environment for unrushed and reflective tasting. Such tranquillity is bliss when judging and would make a peaceful getaway break for a couple of days, but the competition this year involved two weeks of tasting, and I think



we would have gone stir crazy had we stayed on site. We needed somewhere where we were not in each other's face 24/7—a hotel with a relaxed atmosphere, good food and service, but in a central position, where we could step out and enjoy the buzz. Having stayed in Tunbridge Wells a number of times, the only place that fits the bill, as far as I am concerned, is the informal, shabby-chic Hotel du Vin overlooking Calverly Park. Staying for two weeks is a difficult test for any hotel, and while it would be wrong to suggest that it went without a hitch, I can honestly say that we had a great time and look forward to returning next year.

Tasting sparkling wines

The linchpin of the CSWWC is its unprecedented accumulation of sparkling-wine experience and knowledge. We are used to tasting 100–120 Champagnes a day, though we currently limit the number we judge to 90-odd, yet some of the world's greatest wine tasters struggle when tasting a fraction of this number. Why? For no other reason than they do not specialize in all things bubbly. When discussing the matter with some of the most famous tasters (not just critics, but also members of the trade), a few even question whether it is feasible to taste such large numbers of a fizzy wine, yet when tasting shoulder to shoulder, they seem to have no problem tackling at least as many still wines. CO₂ is their oft-stated problem. Either they consider the fizz to be a barrier through which they have difficulty accessing the wine, or it fatigues their palate.

These guys might not want to take sparkling wine seriously, and that is their prerogative, but it is ridiculous to pretend that CO₂ represents any sort of barrier behind which the taster must probe to access a wine. While the mousse can be analyzed in isolation, the wine certainly cannot. The wine can only be assessed within the context of its mousse. The CO₂ is not only a part of its balance, it is an inseparable part. It is the very fabric that holds a sparkling wine together, even as it ages, softens, and dissipates. Believing that the wine in a sparkling wine can somehow be detached from its CO₂ and evaluated in isolation is as dippy as believing the fruit of a still white wine can somehow be



detached from its acidity and evaluated in isolation. The acidity can be analyzed in isolation, just as the mousse can, but both the acidity and mousse are intrinsic to the balance of the fruit and sparkling wine respectively.

As for those who say that CO₂ tires the palate, I have to take their word. I have heard this many times. I do not suffer from such a problem (in fact, the effervescence lifts my palate), but individual palates differ, and CO₂ might be more wearing for some than others. Even so, I imagine that conditioning could also apply and that a proportion of those whose palates quickly tire when tasting sparkling wine may be able to overcome this if they tasted as much fizz as often as we do.

For those who specialize in sparkling wine, whether from all origins or just Champagne, the mousse is one of the easiest attributes to evaluate. CO₂ creates a tactile sensation that is far more straightforward to evaluate than the complex aroma of a wine. All it requires is for the taster to gauge the strength of the mousse (from aggressive to soft) and the size of its bubbles (in the mouth, not the glass). After this, tasting fizz is little different from tasting any other type of

wine, though for judging purposes the taster should understand the production process and its potential effects on the wine. (I have seen some critics not only mix up autolytic and post-disgorgement aromas, but also use these terms erroneously to describe DMDS, mercaptans, and excessive oxidation.)

The judges

Judging sparkling wine is not a big deal, but bringing together three of the most experienced sparkling-wine specialist tasters for a sparkling-wine competition was one of those simple ideas that no one else seems to have had. Or, at least, one of those simple ideas no one had done anything about. If the idea was that easy, the choice of fellow judges was even easier because Essi Avellan and Tony Jordan were not just my first choice for the CSWWC, they were my first choice at *Decanter* World Wine Awards, too. In fact I took Essi on board because during my nine-year tenure as chair of *Decanter's* Champagne panel, I had to fight the Australian panel for Tony's services, and I lost more times than I

Above: György Márkus, the participating reserve judge and the "unsung hero" of the CSWWC.

won. Now I have both of them judging with me every year, and I do not have to fight anyone.

Essi Avellan MW is Finland's first Master of Wine and the second ever from the Nordic countries. For her MW studies, she wrote her dissertation on single-vineyard Champagnes and won both the Lily Bollinger Medal for best taster and the Tim Derouet Memorial Award for best overall student. Essi is the most naturally gifted and disciplined Champagne taster I have encountered. She has a "mind like a steel trap," according to Karen Palmer, Champagne editor, *Galaxy Guides*, and I would not disagree. Her notes in English are impressively complete.

Dr Tony Jordan co-established Oenotec, a wine and viticultural consultancy that pioneered reductive winemaking through the use of stainless steel, inert gases, and temperature control. With Brian Croser he gave birth to the term "flying winemaker" back in 1978, when they began hopping by plane from harvest to harvest across the vast continent of viticultural Australia. Tony was approached by Moët Hennessy to establish Domaine Chandon at Green Point in the Yarra Valley, eventually becoming chief executive for all of Moët Hennessy's ventures throughout Australasia and the Americas. He now consults on a freelance basis to wine companies in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, China, and India, and recently established Chandon China and Chandon India.

The unsung hero

We have a fourth judge: György Márkus, or George Markus to his English-speaking friends. George is a Hungarian Champagne and Burgundy expert who publishes the highly praised *Burgundia & Champagne*. His knowledge of Champagne is surpassed only by his thirst for that knowledge. He understands the quality issues of Champagne better than most specialist critics, and he is conversant with the factors both positive and negative that determine the quality of all the recent vintages, including those not yet released. George has visited and tasted very widely in Champagne but returns to those producers he respects the most several times a year. He is one of the sharpest Champagne tasters I know, and

after Essi and Tony he is the one I most enjoy tasting with and have the greatest respect for.

So, what does George do? Well, the CSWWC's ethos of using the same three specialist judges to evaluate all the wines in the competition has just one weakness: What if one of us is taken ill or otherwise waylaid? This is where George comes in. He is our permanent reserve judge, shadowing us in every tasting. This should enable him to step in without any notice or disruption to the judging process. It has not been necessary so far, but he makes us feel safe. As reserve judge, his scores do not contribute to our decisions, of course, but nor do we ignore him. George is hugely respected by everyone. He calls out his score with the rest of us, and he joins in the discussion of every wine that attracts differing viewpoints. He knows that his scores will not count, and yet he participates enthusiastically and with such good grace. George is undoubtedly the unsung hero of the competition.

Sensible Wine Services

SWS are the best and most experienced logistics people in the UK for wine tastings and competitions. They are the guiding hand behind *Decanter* World Wine Awards, International Wine Challenge, International Wine & Spirit Competition, and most of the biggest annual tastings in the country. A niche competition like CSWWC is therefore small fry, but SWS treats us with equally meticulous professionalism. Karl Franz, a director of SWS, has always looked after us personally. With his irrepressible assistant Reg Garbutt, Karl has worked the service of our tastings down to a fine art this year, with all the wines served at a perfect temperature, and most second bottles opened and poured within less than 120 seconds of finding a faulty wine! We open up second bottles at the slightest expression of doubt from a single judge, so we must have speedy replacements if they are not to upset the flow of judging. We sometimes even open a third bottle, and if the wine does not win a gold or silver medal, Orsi Szentkiralyi, our director of tasting quality control, will open the fourth.

SWS receives and stores the wines, numbering, logging, and sorting them into tasting order. It also transports, chills, opens, and serves the wines in

coded Riedel glasses. We do not see even wrapped-up bottles. More than any other style of wine, if a fizz is not in a standard bottle, then most experienced tasters only have to feel its shape or see the top of the bottle poking through the wrapping to guess its identity. That is why I insisted on service by coded glasses at *Decanter*, and why we do the same at the CSWWC. SWS is a UK stockholder of Riedel stemware, including Vinum Chianti, the best multipurpose technical tasting glass on the market and the only glass we use for CSWWC judging.

The 2015 results

With 113 new producers, a 37.5 percent increase in the number of countries represented and 36 percent more gold- and silver-medal-winning wines this year, the Best in Class doubled and the potential number of World Champions by Style became so ridiculously large that those trophies would have been devalued. I therefore took an executive decision to make National trophies the highest and most prestigious trophies in 2015, with the single, illustrious exception of the Supreme World Champion, of course. Everyone wants to know the best in show!

Next year it is very likely that we shall see the return of World Champions by Style, but they will have to be reduced to a select few (no more than, say, six), and that will have to involve a complete and commensurate change in the taste-off tree. For 2015, however, we celebrate origin above style.

Magnum memoria

If it says magnum (M), we mean magnum: Don't buy the 75cl equivalent and expect the same quality, because you are going to be sorely disappointed. If you see a Champagne you know well and do not rate it highly, yet it has won a gold or even higher for its magnum, please do not be dismissive. Please try the magnum before making up your mind, and if you cannot buy magnums locally, start asking your local retailer to stock magnums. If you really don't believe there can be such a difference, why not buy both 75cl bottles and magnums and invite some friends around for a comparison? Many Champagne consumers understand that magnums are superior, but few realize just how big the difference can be.



BEST IN CLASS

All the wines submitted were initially tasted and evaluated by origin and style. This ensured that each wine's medal potential was evaluated according to its own typicity of provenance. Within each category of origin, the wines were assessed strictly by style (all the Brut Nature together, all the Blanc de Blancs, Rosé, etc). Where no gold medals were awarded, no wine of that style from that provenance could progress any further in the competition. But where there were gold-medal winners, we grouped them together, demoted any that did not stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest, and chose the Best in Class.

Australian Best-Value Sparkling Wine
Madfish NV Vera's Cuvée Sparkling White Brut

Australian Future Release
Jansz Tasmania 2009 Premium Vintage Cuvée Brut

Australian NV Blend
House of Arras NV A by Arras Premium Cuvée Brut

Australian Rosé
Taltarni 2011 Taché Brut

Australian Sparkling Sweet Aromatic
Jacob's Creek NV Sparkling Moscato

Australian Vintage Blend
House of Arras 2005 Grand Vintage Brut

California Best-Value Sparkling Wine
Roederer Estate NV Brut (M)

California Future Release
Caraccioli Cellars 2009 Brut Rosé

California Magnum
Roederer Estate NV Brut Rosé (M)

California NV Blend
Roederer Estate NV Brut (M)

California NV Rosé
Roederer Estate NV Brut Rosé (M)

California Vintage Blend
Caraccioli Cellars 2007 Brut Cuvée

California Vintage Rosé
Caraccioli Cellars 2007 Brut Rosé

Canadian NV Blend
Trius NV Brut

Cap Classique Best Value
Klein Constantia 2012 Brut

Cap Classique Blanc de Blancs
Avondale 2009 Armilla Blanc de Blanc [sic] Brut

Cap Classique Brut Nature
Graham Beck 2009 Brut Zero

Cap Classique Organic
Avondale 2009 Armilla Blanc de Blanc [sic] Brut

Cap Classique Rosé
Graham Beck 2009 Rosé Brut

Cap Classique Vintage Blend
Graham Beck 2009 Brut Zero

Cava Best Value
Vilarnau NV Brut Reserva

Cava Blanc de Noirs
Segura Viudas NV Reserva Heredad Pinot Noir Brut

Cava Brut Nature
Mas Macià NV Cava Reserva Brut Nature

Cava NV Blend
Segura Viudas NV Gran Cuvée Reserva Brut

Cava Vintage Blend
Vilarnau 2010 Gran Reserva (Brut Nature)

Champagne Best Value
Les Pionniers 2006 Vintage Brut

Champagne Extra Brut
Jacquart NV Extra-Brut

Champagne Future Release
Palmer & Co NV Blanc de Noirs Brut

Champagne Library Vintage
Charles Heidsieck 1983 Brut (M)

Champagne NV Blanc de Blancs
Ruinart NV Blanc de Blancs Brut (M)

Champagne NV Blend
Charles Heidsieck NV Brut Réserve

Champagne NV Magnum
Pommery NV Brut Royal (M)

Champagne NV Rosé
Charles Heidsieck NV Rosé Réserve Brut

Champagne Vintage Blanc de Blancs
Nicolas Feuillatte 2006 Grand Cru Chardonnay Millésime Brut

Champagne Vintage Blend
Moët & Chandon 2004 Grand Vintage Brut (M)

Champagne Vintage Magnum
Moët & Chandon 2004 Grand Vintage Brut (M)

Champagne Vintage Rosé
Louis Roederer 2009 Rosé Brut

Deluxe Champagne Blanc de Blancs
Taittinger 2006 Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs Brut

Deluxe Champagne Blend
Dom Pérignon 1998 Plénitude 2 Brut

Deluxe Champagne Future Release
Duval-Leroy 1996 Femme Brut (M)

Deluxe Champagne Magnum
Pommery NV Les Clos Pompadour Brut (M)

Deluxe Champagne Rosé
Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé Brut

English Blanc de Noirs
Chapel Down 2009 Blanc de Noirs Brut

English Future Release
Bolney Wine Estate 2009 Blanc de Blancs Brut (M)

English Rosé
Camel Valley 2012 Pinot Noir (Rosé) Brut

English Sparkling Wine Best Value
Coates & Seely NV Blanc de Blancs Brut

English Vintage Blanc de Blancs
Coates & Seely NV Blanc de Blancs Brut

English Vintage Blanc de Blancs
Nyetimber 2009 Blanc de Blancs Brut

English Vintage Blend
Nyetimber 2010 Classic Cuvée Brut

Franciacorta Best Value
Guido Berlucchi NV 61 Brut

Franciacorta Blanc de Blancs
Biondelli NV Blanc de Blancs Brut (M)

Franciacorta Brut Nature
Uberti 2007 Non Dosato Sublimis (M)

Franciacorta Extra Brut
Quadra 2009 Qzero Extra Brut

Franciacorta NV Blend
Guido Berlucchi NV 61 Brut

Franciacorta NV Magnum
Biondelli NV Blanc de Blancs Brut (M)

Franciacorta Vintage Blanc de Blancs
Uberti 2007 Non Dosato Sublimis (M)

Franciacorta Vintage Blend
Lantieri 2010 Cuvée Arcadia Millesimato Brut

Franciacorta Vintage Magnum
Uberti 2007 Non Dosato Sublimis (M)

German Organic Sparkling Wine
Solter 2009 Rheingau Riesling Sekt Réserve Brut

German Sparkling Brut Aromatic

Solter 2009 Rheingau Riesling Sekt Réserve Brut

Italian Sparkling Sweet Aromatic

Maelli 2013 Fior d'Arancio Spumante (Doux/Sweet)

Limoux Best Value

Paul Mas NV Côte Mas Crémant de Limoux Rosé Brut

Limoux Rosé

Paul Mas NV Prima Perla Rosé Brut

Loire Best-Value Sparkling Wine

Bouvet 2010 Trésor Blanc Brut

Loire Vintage Blend

Bouvet 2010 Trésor Blanc Brut

New Zealand Best-Value Sparkling Wine

Hunter's NV Mirumir™ Méthode Traditionelle Brut

New Zealand NV Brut Blend

Cloudy Bay NV Pelorus Brut

New Zealand Vintage Blend

Hunter's 2010 Mirumir™ Reserve Méthode Traditionelle Brut

Oltrepò Pavese Blanc de Blancs

Tenuta Scarpa Colombi 2010 Roberto Colombi Blanc de Blancs Brut (M)

Oltrepò Pavese Magnum

Tenuta Scarpa Colombi 2010 Roberto Colombi Blanc de Blancs Brut (M)

Organic Cava

Raventós i Blanc 2007 Manuel Raventós Brut

Prosecco Best Value

Astoria NV Arzanà Cartizze (Sec)

Prosecco Dry

Nino Franco 2014 Cartizze (Sec)

Prosecco NV Brut

Nino Franco NV Brut

Prosecco Vintage Brut

Nino Franco 2014 Vigneto della Riva di San Floriano Brut

Serbia and Montenegro Blanc de Blancs

Trijumf 2009 Chardonnay Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut

Serbia and Montenegro Blanc de Noirs

Trijumf 2009 Noir Extra Brut

Spanish Sparkling Sweet Aromatic

Freixenet NV Mia Moscato Pink (Doux/Sweet)

Trentodoc NV Blend

Ferrari NV Maximum Brut (M)

Trentodoc Best Value

Rotari NV Brut Rosé

Trentodoc Blanc de Blancs

Ferrari 2006 Perlé Brut (M)

Trentodoc Blanc de Noirs

Ferrari 2007 Perlé Nero Brut

Trentodoc Future Release

Rotari 2011 AlpeRegis Rosé Brut

Trentodoc Library Vintage

Ferrari 1995 Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore Brut (M)

Trentodoc NV Magnum

Ferrari NV Maximum Brut (M)

Trentodoc Rosé

Rotari NV Brut Rosé

Trentodoc Vintage Magnum

Ferrari 2006 Perlé Brut (M)

Trentodoc Vintage Rosé

Ferrari 2007 Perlé Rosé Brut (M)

SPECIAL AWARDS

Before revealing the National Champion trophies, two awards deserve special attention: Sparkling Wine Producer of the Year and Chairman's Trophy. Since sparkling-wine makers move around and the lead time for this style of wine is so long, they can be in a new position for 3-5 years before their own wines hit the market. The Sparkling Wine Producer of the Year, therefore, recognizes a producer rather than a specific winemaker, who might not have made the wines being awarded.

SPARKLING WINE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR**Ferrari, Trentodoc**

With an astonishing nine gold medals, five of which won seven Best in Class awards between them, Ferrari may have set a record that will never be matched, let alone bettered (though we would love others to try!). Earlier in the year, I had visited Ferrari, on the outskirts of Trento, and urged the owners Matteo and Camilla Lunelli to enter more wines this year. I always try to encourage potential producers of silver medal quality and higher to enter the CSWWC, whatever part of the world I am in, but Ferrari had already demonstrated their potential the year before and I was pushing them to go further. In our very first competition, Ferrari's 2007 Perlé won the Best Italian Sparkling Wine trophy, while the 2002 vintage of their top-of-the-range Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore picked up a silver medal. I felt they could do even better. What's more, I felt their Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore could do a lot better. Although the 2002 performed less successfully than the 2007 Perlé, it was the best vintage of Giulio Ferrari Riserva I had tasted. Until my 2015 visit, I had found most of Ferrari's older vintages far too oxidative, particularly the Giulio Ferrari Riserva. I therefore asked Matteo and Camilla if I could taste the entire range forward and backward, and to taste as many of the older vintages in both

bottle and magnum formats. I was blown away! My impression of Ferrari has gone from "classy range, but forget the older vintages" to "classy range, especially the older vintages in magnums." Well, they must have been taking notes, because they entered nine wines and won nine golds. And the other two judges must have agreed, because I don't think I've witnessed a performance quite like that in my life.

CHAIRMAN'S TROPHY**Cuvage NV Rosé (Brut Nature)**Piemonte VSQ, Italy (75cl, 12%) Italy
100% Nebbiolo (11g RS)

I might have established this competition, but I gave myself no additional power when deciding the medals, Best in Class, or any of the regular trophies. I deliberately made all three judges equal, because there is nothing more divisive and illogical than a judging system that can end in deadlock and must rely on someone with a casting vote. Every judge in every competition has his or her own "personal golds" that other judges fail to recognize, and the judges of the CSWWC are no different. In fact, the only difference at the CSWWC (and it is a huge difference) is that all three judges must agree a gold medal, and (as importantly) it is the same three judges who have to agree every gold medal. If any result in this competition demonstrates that I have no undue influence over the judging process, it is Cuvage Rosé. I tried my hardest to persuade my fellow judges that this gloriously pale, fresh, and delicate sparkling wine is gold-medal quality. I failed and it remained a silver, which is in itself a highly desirable medal. However, I am always being asked what non-Champagne grape varieties might be good for sparkling wine, and if any competition in the world should be shining a spotlight on this it is the CSWWC. That is why, in total transparency, I award the first-ever Chairman's Trophy to a silver-medal wine made from the Nebbiolo grape: Cuvage Rosé.

**THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS**

From the Best in Class for each region or country, we conduct a taste-off to find the most outstanding wine for the National Champions, the most prestigious group of trophies in the competition.

**AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****House of Arras 2005 Grand Vintage Brut**

Tasmania, Australia (75cl, 12.5%) 69.2%
Chardonnay, 30.8% Pinot Noir (7.1g RS)

- Best in Class Australian Vintage Blend
Big, rich, and plush, with coconut, vanilla, and cinnamon aromas, and bags of soft, ripe, coconutty vanilla fruit on the palate. So soft to the very end, yet elegant, long, and balanced in its own, unique way.

**CANADIAN NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****Trius NV Brut**

VQA Niagara Peninsula, Ontario, Canada (75cl, 12%) 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir (8g RS)

- Best in Class Canadian NV Blend
Pale lemon color, with a fresh and elegantly restrained, biscuity nose, followed through on to a light but playful, crisp, clean palate. Lovely tingling acidity. Very drinkable!

**ENGLISH NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****Nyetimber 2010 Classic Cuvée Brut**

England (75cl, 12%) 51% Pinot Noir, 36% Chardonnay, 13% Pinot Meunier (10.5g RS)

- Best in Class English Vintage Blend
Medium lemon color. Just so fresh and inviting, yet instantly indicative of class and complexity. This is great-quality sparkling, with a stylishly yeast-complexed, red-fruit nose, perfectly mirrored on the palate. A gorgeous melange of yeast-complexed fruit, with gentle hints of toast and full, sweet fruitiness coming through. Long and linear with a lovely acid line leading to a stunningly crisp finish. Superb! Drink now or in 10 years.

**FRENCH NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé Brut**

AOC Champagne (Deluxe Cuvée), France (75cl, 12%) 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay (9g RS)

- Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Rosé
Although the Deluxe Champagnes are kept out of the Champagne Best in Class awards, all the Deluxe Champagne Trophy winners are allowed to compete for the French National Champion Trophy. (It is one thing restricting Best in Class to relatively affordable Champagnes, but quite another when looking for the best of the best.) After a ballot, we opted for Cristal Rosé for the second year running, albeit the 2004 this year (the 2002 last year). Its exquisitely pale-peach color says it all, because this is clearly a Champagne of precision, not power, and of wonder, not weight, with deliciously sophisticated, delicately yeast-complexed flavors and spot-on balance. Quite how any Champagne can be so

light and yet so long is as mind-boggling as how it can be so ready and yet promise to be even finer after a few more years' bottle age in ideal storage conditions. This is super-elegant and super-refined, but to keep it that way, leave its orange film in place, do not remove the bottle from its box, and store it in a cool and dark place until you have to chill and open the bottle. The clear-glass bottle offers no protection from ultra-violet rays, which can create unpleasant light-struck aromas. Treat this wine with the respect it deserves, and you will be rewarded many times over.

**GERMAN NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****Solter 2009 Rheingau Riesling Sekt
Réserve Brut**

Germany (75cl, 12.5%) 100% Riesling (9.3g RS)

- Best in Class German Sparkling Brut Aromatic
- Best in Class Organic German Sparkling Wine
Medium-deep lemon-gold color, with a fresh yet age-mellowed, floral-petrol Riesling aroma, honeyed terpenes on the palate, and fine acidity on the finish. Very smart Riesling Sekt, and organic!

**ITALIAN NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****Ferrari 2006 Perlé Brut (Magnum)**

Trentodoc, Trentino Alto Adige, Italy (150cl, 12.5%) 100% Chardonnay (6g RS)

- Best Trentodoc
- Best in Class Trentodoc Blanc de Blancs
- Best in Class Trentodoc Vintage Magnum
Super-toasty and super-good! Restrained but stunning toasted-coffee nose; seriously good, rich, caressing, and creamy palate of great freshness and complexity. Superbly balanced, with great acidity marking its long and lingering finish. So classy! Wonderful!

**NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL
CHAMPION SPARKLING WINE****Hunter's 2010 Mirumiru™ Reserve
Méthode Traditionelle Brut**

Wairau Valley, Marlborough, New Zealand (75cl, 12.5%) 55% Pinot Noir, 44% Chardonnay, 1% Pinot Meunier (6.5g RS)

- Best in Class New Zealand Vintage Blend
Lemon color with full, enticing, bottle-developed aromas of sweet, candied fruit. A complete and moreish sparkling wine that is full of fruit-laden charm, gaining in freshness and lightness as it spreads out into a peacock's tail on the finish. Some phenolic grip on the aftertaste. Stylish, rich, and fresh. Well balanced. Nascent complexity.

**SERBIAN & MONTENEGRIN NATIONAL
CHAMPION SPARKLING WINE****Trijumf 2009 Chardonnay Blanc de
Blancs Extra Brut**

Oplenac, Šumadija, Serbia and Montenegro (75cl, 12%) 100% Chardonnay (7.8g RS)

- Best in Class Serbia and Montenegro Blanc de Blancs

Vibrant lemon color. Soft, plush nose, very clean and inviting. With a light smattering of blossom aromas and bottle-developed, yeast-complexed fruit in the background, this wine has rich, succulent, sherbety fruit that is fresh and glides to a crisp, long, zippy finish.

**SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL
CHAMPION SPARKLING WINE****Avondale 2009 Armilla Blanc de Blanc
[sic] Brut**

Méthode Cap Classique, Paarl, South Africa (75cl, 11.5%) 100% Chardonnay (9.7g RS)

- Best in Class Cap Classique Biodynamic
- Best in Class Cap Classique Blanc de Blancs
Pale lemon color. Oak, lemon, white flower blossom and melon aromas, with crisp and succulent fruit on the palate. Good freshness and fine, classic, creamy blanc de blancs structure that glides to a silky finish. The only biodynamic wine to win a gold medal, let alone a trophy!

**SPANISH NATIONAL CHAMPION
SPARKLING WINE****Segura Viudas NV Reserva Heredad
Pinot Noir Brut**

DO Cava, Catalunya, Spain (75cl, 12%) 100% Pinot Noir (9g RS)

- Best in Class Cava Blanc de Noirs
- Best in Class Cava from an International Variety
Pale peachy color; you have to hold it to the light to discern. An elegant nose of fruit-forward peach and ripe pear. Ultra-fruity and succulent on the palate. So light, yet long and effortlessly delicious.

**US NATIONAL CHAMPION SPARKLING
WINE****Caraccioli Cellars 2007 Brut Cuvée**

Santa Lucia Highlands AVA, California, United States (75cl, 12%) 40% Pinot Noir, 60% Chardonnay (12.5g RS)

- Best in Class California Vintage Blend
Bright lemon color. Beautifully creamy and toasty aromas; so mellow, harmonious, and complex. Huge acids make for a crisp palate with a seemingly infinite acid line, yet the mouthfeel is beautifully soft and fluffy, thanks to its super-refined mousse. To produce such a classic reductive style using 100 percent oak is a demonstration of barrique handling at its most masterful.

THE SUPREME WORLD CHAMPION**Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé**

All the National Trophies are tasted off against each other to find the most outstanding wine in the entire competition. Last year it was Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé, and this year it is Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé!

Palmes d'Or^{de} *Nicolas Feuillatte*



Photo: Laurent Rodriguez

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