

Third World Championships

Tom Stevenson gives a judge's perspective on this year's Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, explaining its growing appeal and higher success rate, and identifying the top winners

Now in its third year, The Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships (CSWWC) received 22 percent more entries than the previous year and awarded a record 149 gold and 143 silver medals. In 2016, producers from no fewer than 26 countries entered their sparkling wines, including first-time participants from Armenia, Croatia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The number of Champagne producers entering the competition increased for the third year running, and we were pleased to discover a large proportion of this year's new producers were growers. In fact, 25 percent of all Champagne producers who entered were growers, enabling us to award Best Grower Champagne for the very first time.

This year we reintroduced World Champions by Style trophies. In 2014 we followed the logic of awarding trophies for every Best in Class category, but in 2015, with 113 new entrants and a substantial increase in the countries represented, the number of Best in Class winners doubled. This meant that the potential number of World Champions by Style would have been ridiculous, so we dropped them. In 2016 there were eight possible World Champions by Style, of which only six won (*see below*).

CSWWC is the toughest and most respected sparkling-wine competition in the world. Every entry is judged by the same three specialists: Essi Avellan MW, Dr Tony Jordan, and me. We like to think that our unique combination of experience enables us to deliver the fairest and most consistent results, year in and year out. A CSWWC gold medal should be the ultimate accolade for any serious sparkling-wine producer anywhere in the world. It certainly offers the most reliable yardstick for consumers who appreciate that sparkling wine is a classic wine in its own right, deserving its place at the table.

Although every wine tasted is blind-assessed as gold, silver, bronze, commended, or "no award," we award only gold and silver medals. I would be proud to serve a silver-medal wine to any guest, however knowledgeable, but we refuse to award silver medals for Deluxe Champagnes. If a Deluxe Champagne demands a high premium, then so do we—it must be gold or nothing.

Bronze and below

In the past, I have declared that at CSWWC we "consign bronze medals and commended wines to the dustbin of shame along with the 'no awards' that all other competitions put there." And while we will always maintain this policy, I must confess that there are circumstances when we do have more than a passing interest in bronze-medal wines. Furthermore, I recognize that this strategy might one day achieve the very thing it has sought to avoid...

We are very interested in bronze-medal wines from new producers who are serious about quality, particularly when they are located in emerging regions or established regions with very little history of sparkling-wine production. It is very hard for such producers to gauge how they are progressing when they have no local competition of world-class quality. This is why feedback from the same three sparkling-wine specialists every year can be so important in providing a consistent, objective, and authoritative assessment. We have even, on occasions, supplied a bronze-medal certificate, entirely at our own discretion, to help those who, we believe, are seriously trying to excel against the odds.

We are even interested in bronze medals won by established producers who regularly win gold medals. I usually recommend they submit the same wine in magnum the following year. Nine

times out of ten, a 75cl bottle that has won bronze will win silver in magnum. The difference is regularly that great. Maybe one in 20 will win a gold. Once a producer sees that the same wine is intrinsically silver- or gold-medal quality, he can work backward, examining each point in the production process, tightening up the quality control as he goes. The magnums will always be superior, but if the quality is there, the 75cl bottles can be improved.

How might our bronze-and-below strategy achieve the very thing it sought to avoid? We decided to focus on the crème de la crème because 30 percent of wines that are entered into major competitions receive a bronze medal, and approximately 25 percent are awarded commended or the equivalent. With bronze and commended included, competitions are effectively saying that two out of every three wines they taste deserve an award. Furthermore, the possibility that an iconic wine could be judged bronze or commended scares away the very best wines. We wanted our awards to be more exclusive than two out of three—and what use is there in winning a competition that does not include the best? This strategy has worked so well for CSWWC that it is in danger of become a victim of its own success. Not only have we seen the likes of Dom Pérignon, MCH, Cristal, et al demonstrating that they have the quality to match their reputations, but producers in general have recalibrated their entries each year, dropping wines that are unlikely to win gold or silver. In the past (the very recent past, as far as CSWWC is concerned), entries were chosen for marketing reasons, producers hoping that a medal might increase sales of a wine or open up a specific market for it. Now, however, more and more producers are selecting entries that have the best chance of winning gold or silver, and the percentage of success is nudging upward. If this continues, we could theoretically arrive at the very place we had hoped to avoid, where two out of every three wines we taste receive an award. If we do our job properly, though, they will truly deserve their gold and silver medals and we will fulfill our aim of finding the very best sparkling wines—so, if and when we do become the victim of our own success, we will embrace it.



This year's judging

Sensible Wine Services handled the logistics as seamlessly as ever, and our flight-by-flight progress under Simon Stockton, the new super-efficient competition steward, was a dream. With our proactive clear-bottle protection policy firmly established for the second year running, light-struck faults were almost entirely eradicated in 2016, leaving TCA once again as the primary identifiable fault. At just 0.8 percent, however, the occurrence of TCA taint was a far cry from the 1990s, when it was regularly between eight and ten times more prevalent. We had just one oxidized wine, though there were many with varying degrees of oxidativeness, which is not a fault per se but does affect our scoring. As long as an oxidative or aldehydic aroma is negligible or, at the most, secondary, we do not consider it too great a negative. However, bottle fermentation is essentially a reductive process, thus the more dominant any oxidative aroma is, the more we mark it down, just as we would mark down dominant reductive aromas in an essentially oxidative wine like Sherry.

We are also in our second full year of proactive bottle-variation elimination, where Orsi Szentkirályi, who is in charge of our tasting quality control, opens a fresh bottle of every wine that fails to make at least silver-medal grade (or gold in the case of Deluxe Champagnes) and compares that bottle with the one that was judged. When there is a significant difference, the fresh bottle is slipped back into the judging process under a different code, and we have a chance to reassess it without referring back to our previous notes. Over two years, we have been staggered by the amount of bottle variation. It should not be such a surprise, I suppose. After all, every traditional-method wine undergoes its own bottle fermentation, arguably making it its very own, different wine. However, the vast majority of bottle variation due to this or, perhaps, other factors, such as the difference in porosity of the cork, is much of a muchness and of little interest to us. Orsi's job is to pluck out the relatively few instances where a significant variation can make the difference between one grade of medal and another. If a wine is faulty, it is easy enough for a judge 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? All wines possess varying degrees of fruit and vitality, thus scalping could simply be construed as a lack of fruit and vitality by a blind taster. I know of many competitions that have excellent tasting quality control, but it is always of the wine as tasted, never comparing it to a freshly opened bottle. Although Orsi had to trawl through several hundred wines to find just two instances where a wine was elevated from bronze (one to a silver, the other to a gold) this year, it was still well worth the effort, because those two wines deserved their medals as much as any other medal-winning wines in the competition. I would be equally happy if she found no significant bottle variation whatsoever, because at least we would have checked, and that gives me peace of mind.

Tasting venue

It was our second year at Salomons Estate in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, where we are beginning to feel at home, as indeed we must if we are to judge in the same place for two weeks. Thankfully, this historic country house with its 36 acres (14.5ha) of parkland really does provide the perfect environment for unrushed and reflective tasting. We would lose the psychological benefit of entering the peace and tranquillity of these grounds every morning if we also stopped over 24/7, which is why we stay in the center of town at the informal, shabby-chic Hotel du Vin, where the rooms overlook Calverley Park.

This was the year when George Markus, our permanent reserve judge, stepped up to the plate. Last year I described him as the “unsung hero” of the competition because he shadows our every move, tasting every flight of every style every year, and although he is included in every discussion about every wine, we never include his scores. He does this to keep sharp and in the zone, so that he can judge for real should Essi, Tony, or I fall ill—a thankless task performed so skillfully and with such good grace. Before we started CSWWC, George was already one of the top Champagne tasters in the world, but he had very little experience of fizz from beyond the hallowed boundaries of that famous region. Now he is a gifted

and experienced taster of many other sparkling wines as well.

In the middle of this year's competition, Tony Jordan informed me of his decision to stand down for the New Zealand flights. He is the consultant for two Kiwi producers, Akarua and Hunter's, both of whom tend to excel, and with the limited size of the New Zealand sparkling-wine industry, he thought he might compromise the CSWWC, either by recognizing his client's wines or at least by exposing us to accusations that he could have recognized them. So, George took his place, and the integration was seamless. Little did we know that it would turn out to be a useful test-run, because a couple of days later Tony went down with a bug and George replaced him for every flight of Champagne. Fortunately for Tony he recovered in time for the final day, when we tackle the trophy taste-offs, to which everyone looks forward and no one likes to miss. Unfortunately for me, I picked up a bug, and George had to save the day again.

The results

Please note that if we indicate that a gold- or silver-winning wine was from a magnum, we mean precisely that: a magnum, not a bottle. If you buy the bottle equivalent of such a wine, you may well be disappointed, unless the 75cl also happens to be listed as having won the same grade of medal. (There are very few examples.) If you see a wine you know well and have not rated highly in the past, yet it has won a CSWWC gold or silver in the magnum format, please do not dismiss the result as incredulous: Buy the magnum, and taste the difference. Judged under blind conditions, we have no idea if we are tasting from magnums or 75cl bottles, yet proportionately magnums win three times as many gold medals as 75cl bottles. This will be no surprise to many sparkling aficionados who are well acquainted with the “magnum effect,” preferring to buy, cellar, and drink magnums whenever possible. Worried about when you will have the opportunity to open magnums? Don't be. Keep a magnum resealed with a temporary closure in the fridge and it will not only last twice as long but will give you twice the quality in the process. If you have to buy 75cl bottles, then make sure you buy those that win gold or silver medals at CSWWC.



BEST IN CLASS

All of the wines entered in to the competition are initially evaluated by origin and by style. This ensures that the medal potential of each wine is evaluated according to its own typicity of provenance, rather than to some international yardstick. Within each category of origin, the wines are assessed by style—for example, all the *brut* natures together, all the blanc de blancs, all the blanc de noirs, all the rosés, and so on. Where no gold medals are awarded, no wine of that style and provenance can progress any further in the competition, but where there are gold-medal winners, they are grouped together to find the Best in Class. We also take this opportunity to demote any golds that do not stand shoulder to shoulder with the golds won in other flights of the same class.

House of Arras 2006 Blanc de Blancs
Best Australian Blanc de Blancs

House of Arras NV A by Arras
Best Australian NV Blend
Best Value Australian Sparkling Wine

Jansz Tasmania NV Premium Rosé
Best Australian NV Rosé

Chandon 2005 Prestige Cuvée
Best Australian Vintaged Blend

House of Arras 2006 Rosé
Best Australian Vintaged Rosé

Santa Digna Estelado Rosé NV Uva País
Best Chilean Rosé
Best Chilean Organic

Chandon NV Brut Rosé
Best Chinese Rosé

Wiston Estate 2010 Blanc de Blancs
Best English Blanc de Blancs

Hattingley Valley 2011 Blanc de Blancs
Best English Future Release

Ridgeview 2009 Rosé de Noirs (magnum)
Best English Magnum

Plumpton Estate NV The Dean Brut
Best English NV Blend

Plumpton Estate NV The Dean Blush
Best English NV Rosé

Squerries 2011 Brut
Best English Vintaged Blend

Hattingley Valley 2013 Rosé
Best English Vintaged Rosé

Gremillet NV Blanc de Noirs
Best Champagne Blanc de Noirs

Moët & Chandon 1998 Grand Vintage Collection
Best Champagne Future Release (a re-release)

Charles Heidsieck 1989 Brut Jéroboam (3 liters)
Best Champagne Library Vintage

Ruinart NV Blanc de Blancs (magnum)
Best Champagne NV Blanc de Blancs
Best Champagne NV Magnum

Charles Heidsieck NV Brut Réserve
Best Champagne NV Blend

Barnaut Authentique NV Grand Cru Rosé
Best Champagne NV Rosé
Best Grower Champagne

Louis Roederer 2010 Blanc de Blancs Brut
Best Champagne Vintaged Blanc de Blancs

Moët & Chandon 2006 Grand Vintage (magnum)
Best Champagne Vintaged Blend
Best Champagne Vintaged Magnum

Louis Roederer 2010 Brut Rosé
Best Champagne Vintaged Rosé

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

Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Brut (magnum)
Best Deluxe Champagne Blend
Best Deluxe Champagne Magnum
Best Deluxe Champagne

Dom Pérignon Rosé 1995 P2
Best Deluxe Champagne Library Vintage

Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Brut Rosé (magnum)
Best Deluxe Champagne Rosé

Bouvet-Ladubay Saumur Saphir 2013 Brut
Best Loire Blend

Devaux NV Ultra D (magnum)
Best Low- or No-Dosage Champagne

Pommery Les Clos Pompadour Mis en Cave 2003 (magnum)
Best Single-Vineyard Champagne

Waitrose 2005 Special Réserve Vintage
Best Supermarket Champagne
Best Value Champagne

Kreinbacher 2011 Brut Classic (magnum)
Best Hungarian Blanc de Blancs
Best Hungarian Magnum

Fratelli Berlucchi Freccianera 2012 Satèn
Best Franciacorta Future Release

Biondelli NV Brut (magnum)
Best Franciacorta NV Blanc de Blancs
Best Value Franciacorta

Berlucchi '61 NV Brut
Best Franciacorta NV Blend

Berlucchi '61 NV Rosé (magnum)
Best Franciacorta NV Rosé
Best Franciacorta Magnum

Lantieri 2011 Arcadia Millesimato Brut
Best Franciacorta Vintaged Brut Blend

Uberti 2008 Comari del Salem (magnum)
Best Low- or No-Dosage Franciacorta

Nino Franco 2015 Primo Franco
Best Prosecco Dry

Tenuta Degli Ultimi 2013 Rive di Collalto Biancariva
Best Prosecco Low- or No-Dosage

Nino Franco NV Rustico
Best Prosecco NV Brut

Nino Franco 2015 Vigneto della Riva di San Floriano
Best Prosecco Vintaged Brut

Madame Martis 2006 Rare Vintage
Best Trentodoc Blend

Ferrari 2007 Riserva Lunelli
Best Trentodoc Low- or No-Dosage

Ferrari NV Brut (magnum)
Best Trentodoc NV Blanc de Blancs
Best Trentodoc Magnum

Rotari Rosé NV Brut Rosé (exclusively Italian off-trade)
Best Trentodoc NV Rosé
Best Value Trentodoc

Ferrari 2008 Perlé Brut (magnum)
Best Trentodoc Vintaged Blanc de Blancs

Rotari Alperegis 2011 Rosé
Best Trentodoc Vintaged Rosé

No.1 Assemblé NV Brut
Best New Zealand NV Brut Blend

Hunter's Mirumiru™ NV Rosé
Best New Zealand Rosé

Hunter's Mirumiru™ 2011 Reserve
Best New Zealand Vintaged Brut Blend

Graham Beck 2009 Cuvée Clive
Best South African Brut Blend

Juvé y Camps Cinta Púrpura 2012 Brut Reserva
Best Cava Future Release

Vilarnau NV Brut Reserva
Best Cava NV Brut Blend

1+1=3 2014 Brut Rosé
Best Cava Rosé

Mas Codina 2013 Brut Reserva
Best Cava Vintaged Blend

Segura Viudas NV Gran Cuvée Reserva
Best Low- or No-Dosage Cava

Roederer Estate NV Brut (magnum)
Best California Brut Blend

Roederer Estate NV Brut Rosé (magnum)
Best California Rosé
Best California Magnum



BEST IN REGION

We taste all the Best in Class to find the Best in Region, the highest terroir accolade of the competition. But if a region does not win any gold medals, no Regional Champion can be awarded.

CHAMPAGNE
Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Brut (magnum)

LOIRE
Bouvet-Ladubay Saumur Saphir 2013 Brut

FRANCIACORTA
Berlucchi '61 NV Rosé (magnum)

PROSECCO
Nino Franco NV Rustico

TRENTODOC
Ferrari NV Brut (magnum)

CAVA
1+1=3 2014 Brut Rosé



THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

If there are no recognized sparkling-wine regions within a particular country, all of the Best in Class from the same country compete with each other for a National Champion trophy. If there are recognized sparkling-wine regions, the Best in Regions and any unattached Best in Class compete. But if a country does not win any gold medals, no National Champion trophy can be awarded.

BEST AUSTRALIAN SPARKLING WINE

Chandon 2005 Prestige Cuvée
Yarra Valley, South Australia, Australia
(75cl, 13.2%); 56% Chardonnay, 36% Pinot Noir, 8% Meunier (5g RS)

The pedigree of this wine was obvious to at least one of the three judges, who wrote during our tasting, "Classic Moët gunpowder," before going on to pose the question, "Is this a Chandon?" Superbly toasty, beautiful charred, and exuberantly fruity on the nose. Voluptuous, round, and succulent on the palate, with a soft, long, and lovely, creamy finish.
[While Tasmania might possess the most sought-after sparkling-wine vineyards in Australia, and that small island deservedly won the Best Australian Sparkling Wine trophy last year, Chandon 2005 Prestige Cuvée makes the point that there other exciting fizz areas in the country, since it is composed from grapes grown in the Strathbogie Ranges, the Yarra Valley itself, Macedon, King Valley, and, inevitably, Tasmania.]

BEST CHILEAN SPARKLING WINE

Santa Digna Estelado Rosé NV Uva País
Secano Interior, Central Valley, Chile
(75cl, 12%); 100% País (8g RS)

Exquisitely pale peach color. An elegantly restrained nose, with cool strawberry fruit and an attractive lemony bite to it. Linear fruit fills to the mid-palate and carries well.
[This is produced by Torres Chile in association with a group of Fairtrade growers called Esperanza de la Costa, which is led by the redoubtable Señora Secundina, a legendary figure who works with ancient País vines that are between 150 and 200 years old. The vines harvested for this wine are, however, "only" 80 years old.]

BEST CHINESE SPARKLING WINE

Chandon NV Brut Rosé
Helan Mountain's East Foothills, Ningxia, China
(75cl, 12.5%); 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir (9g RS)

A medium-deep cherry-pink color is followed by a stylishly fragrant nose of red-cherry vibrancy and an attractive toasty undertone. Firm, with a soft and spicy palate, it has a long, well-balanced, true Brut finish. This is not only the best Chinese sparkling wine we have tasted, it is also the best Asian sparkling wine by some distance, despite the extreme youthfulness of the operation.
[Domaine Chandon China was established in 2013 and released its first sparkling wine in 2014. In addition to a fully operational winery and cellars, it is equipped with tasting rooms and a visitor center.]

BEST ENGLISH SPARKLING WINE

Squerries 2011 Brut
South Downs, England
(75cl, 12%); 100% Chardonnay (8g RS)

What lovely, satisfying, linear wine this is. It has bright fruit aromas, fine, focused, yeast-complexed fruit on the palate, and is as clean as a whistle, with a lovely, fluffy mousse and a laser-like finish. I think it is fair to say that we were all totally surprised by the National Trophy result as soon as we discovered its identity, but equally we were pleased as punch that yet another new English sparkling-wine name has hit the heights.
[Produced from grapes grown on Squerries Estate, part of the magnificent, picture-pretty 17th-century Squerries Court, owned by the Warde family since 1731. Squerries Estate is a single-vineyard wine from a chalk escarpment with a flinty-clay topsoil on the North Downs, only 20 miles (32km) from London.]

BEST FRENCH SPARKLING WINE

Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Brut (magnum)
Champagne, France
(1.5 liters, 12.5%); 55% Pinot Noir, 45% Chardonnay (10g RS)

Absolute class, so fine and refined, with an endless, creamy, tapering finish. The fruit is plush, succulent, and juicy, yet its perfect balance and long line provide such finesse. The fruit is so vital and seductive, supported by a mousse that creams and puns in the mouth. There is a sense of grace and stature to this Champagne, and a sense of glacial evolution that knocks years off of its chronological age. This must surely be made from the finest raw materials under the guiding influence of one of today's most gifted winemakers.
[Produced exclusively from Roederer's Domaine 3, which is reserved for Cristal Brut. This domaine consists of Pinot Noir in the grands crus of Aÿ-Champagne, Beaumont-sur-Vesle, Verzenay, Verzy, and a very special premier cru in Mareuil-sur-Aÿ (the lieu-dit "les Clos," which borders grand cru Aÿ and that many rate almost as highly), plus

Chardonnay from the grands crus of Avize, Cramant, and Mesnil-sur-Oger. The difference with 2002 compared to previous Cristal vintages is the increase in oak-fermented components. In the 1990s, oak-fermented wines represented just 10–15 percent of the final Cristal blend, but the oak is large foudres, the effects of which, when combined with the bâtonnage on gros lies are always textural, never aromatic.]

BEST HUNGARIAN SPARKLING WINE

Kreinbacher 2011 Brut Classic (magnum)

Somló, Somló-Hegy, Hungary
(1.5 liters, 12%); 100% Furmint (11.1g RS)

This wine has a bright lemon-gold color, a nicely autolytic nose, with pastry and toasty richness over opulent fruit of absolutely glacial evolution, and a gorgeous vanilla flick of potential complexity on the finish. Would love to age this 3–5 years! [The Non-Vintage Brut Prestige was a different wine and a different class this year, easily deserving its gold over the silver it won in 2015. However, the 2011 Brut Classic, the first Vintage cuvée and the first magnum that Kreinbacher has entered, is on a completely different level again. If the Brut Prestige illustrates how quickly Kreinbacher is learning and improving, then the Brut Classic in magnum clearly demonstrates the sparkling-wine potential for Furmint, which is something that none of us knew until now.]

BEST ITALIAN SPARKLING WINE

Berlucchi '61 NV Rosé (magnum)

Franciacorta DOCG, Lombardy, Italy
(1.5 liters, 12.5%); 40% Chardonnay, 60% Pinot Noir (8g RS)

Strikingly star-bright pale-salmon color. This wine exudes fine aromatics, with pastry complexity and gunpowder notes. This is a wine that is oozing fruit on the palate, but it is very fine fruit, thanks to the silky finesse of its mousse. Some aged complexity. Very long and sophisticated, with an excellent brut finish. Nice acid line adds purity and vitality. [When we saw the identity of the top Italian sparkling wine, it was a bit of a surprise. Guido Berlucchi is the largest producer in Franciacorta, so it was a bit like awarding Moët NV Rosé Best French Sparkling Wine. When some Italian wine experts see the label, they can be a bit sniffy about Guido Berlucchi, but tasted blind, this rosé rocks. It looks smart, it tastes smart, and it is smart. We award medals and trophies according to the quality of the wine, not the volume.]

BEST NEW ZEALAND SPARKLING WINE

Hunter's Mirumiru™ 2011 Reserve

Marlborough, New Zealand
(75cl, 12.5%); 55% Pinot Noir, 42% Chardonnay, 3% Meunier (6.7g RS)

Intense lemon color, yeasty-toasty complexed aromas followed by lovely fruit that dances on the palate and finishes with a soft creaminess. Intelligent blending and use of malolactic. Nice leesy and autolytic undertone. Crisp and classy palate, with a lovely firm and fruity brut finish.

[This was judged in the absence of Tony Jordan, who consults for two wineries in New Zealand, including Hunter's, so he withdrew from judging any of the sparkling wines from this country.]

BEST SOUTH AFRICAN SPARKLING WINE

Graham Beck 2009 Cuvée Clive

Cap Classique, Western Cape, South Africa
(75cl, 12.2%); 80% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir (7.4g RS)

Gunpowder Chardonnay; fine, rich, explosive, as one judge succinctly put it! Medium-lemon color, with an exuberantly toasty, charred nose, laced with notes of ground coffee and leesy complexity. [Pieter Ferreira, the bubbly Mr Bubble of Cap Classique, returns to pick up the South African national trophy, not for his Blanc de Blancs—which is widely regarded as consistently the finest Cap Classique produced—but for Cuvée Clive, Graham Beck's relatively new prestige cuvée. The Chardonnay comes from their limestone vineyards in Robertson, while the Pinot Noir comes from their vineyard in Firgrove, Stellenbosch. The grapes are whole-bunch pressed, with only the tête de cuvée used. Most of the juice is fermented in stainless steel at 61°F (16°C), with a small portion of Chardonnay fermented in oak pièces (205 liters). After bottling, the wines are aged on yeast for a minimum of 60 months.]

BEST SPANISH SPARKLING WINE

1+1=3 2014 Brut Rosé

Cava DO, Alt Penedès, Spain
(75cl, 11.5%); 80% Grenache, 15% Pinot Noir, 5% Trepat (0.7g RS)

You often hear about the New Spain. Well, this is the New Cava and, specifically, the New Cava Rosado: delicate in color, fruit, and weight. So light, long, fine, and fresh, with youthful peachy fruit and a long, soft, linear finish. Crisp and zesty, with a lovely freshness and easiness to it. [I discovered this wine on a recent trip to Penedès and immediately asked for it to be added to a masterclass I was giving in Barcelona. It was then entered into CSWWC, where my fellow judges were equally impressed. Readers might think that 1+1=3 refers to an assemblage where the final product is superior to the sum of its parts, but in fact it refers to the owners, winemaker Josep Pinol and viticulturist Josep Bonnell, who are brothers-in-law. Apparently they believe they work better together than apart.]

BEST US SPARKLING WINE

Roederer Estate NV Brut Rosé (magnum)

Anderson Valley AVA, California, USA
(1.5 liters, 12%); 45% Chardonnay, 55% Pinot Noir (12g RS)

A beautifully pale pink-peach color, gorgeous fruit, and a sumptuous mousse—what more could you ask for? Classy, yeast-complexed, toasty-gunflint nose, with bright, exuberant, cool fruitiness on the palate. Soft, linear, and fruit-driven, an exquisite acid line providing a long, fruity finish.

[In 1987, Roederer Estate produced the first sparkling wine outside of Champagne to achieve the quality not simply of an average Champagne but of a very good Champagne. Its first wine was produced in 1986, but that did not hack it, whereas in 1987, with the benefit of oak-matured reserves from 1986, it did. Nearly a quarter of a century later, this Non-Vintage blend was built around the 2011 harvest, which was not only cool but also rainier than usual in spring and early autumn. So, we have a California sparkling wine made from very European weather collecting the US national trophy.]



WORLD CHAMPIONS BY STYLE

Every appropriate Best in Class in the competition competes for the title of World Champion in eight select sparkling-wine categories (of which only six were awarded this year).

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC NV BRUT BLEND

Charles Heidsieck NV Brut Réserve

Champagne, France (75cl, 12.8%); 33% Pinot Noir, 34% Meunier, 33% Chardonnay (11.2g RS)

This wonderfully toasty Champagne is more like a cellar-aged Non-Vintage than the current Non-Vintage blend. Lovely, charred, roasted-coffee aromas with notes of honey and dried-fruit complexity. Calm, concentrated, and long. [From the most award-winning Champagne producer on the planet, this specific blend was made by the late Thierry Roset. It was Roset who took the tried and tested Brut Réserve recipe of late, great Daniel Thibault and improved it, even though he reduced the number of crus by half (from 120 to just 60). He achieved this minor miracle by placing more emphasis on Oger (for Chardonnay), Ambonnay (for Pinot Noir), and Verneuil (for Meunier), the three crus that have always been the heart and soul of Thibault's highly acclaimed cuvée.

The fatter crayères bottle that he used had a narrower neck, reducing oxygen ingress and thereby slowing the wine's evolution. To compensate for this, he did not alter the proportion of reserve wine (an impressive 40 percent), but he did increase its age, from eight years to between ten and 15 years. Winning the World Champion trophy for NV Brut Blend is a fine tribute to Roset for his contribution to the high reputation of Charles Heidsieck's Brut Réserve.]

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC VINTAGED BRUT BLEND

Moët & Chandon 2006 Grand Vintage (magnum)

Champagne, France
(1.5 liters, 12.5%); 42% Chardonnay,
39% Pinot Noir, 19% Meunier (5g RS)

Judging is not about guessing. In fact, guessing can play havoc with the supposedly objective task of quality assessment under blind conditions, since it introduces an element of subjective bias. However, the Moët gunpowder style is so alive in this wine that it stood out like firework night for everyone. The aromas are very youthful, despite the gunpowdery sulfidic complexity, and this youthfulness is followed on the palate, which is brimming with lovely, sweet, pure fruitiness that is creamy and caressing, lingering in the gentlest manner. While 2006 might not be a great vintage, this magnum of 2006 is a truly great Champagne. *[Produced by the super-talented Benoît Gouez in his second year in full control as chef de cave at Moët, 2006 was the first vintage at this house to benefit from Diam Mytik closures, which eliminate TCA.]*

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT

Ferrari NV Brut (magnum)

Trentodoc, Trentino-Alto Adige, Italy
(1.5 liters, 12.5%); 100% Chardonnay (6g RS)

Autolytic notes over ripe citrus fruit, with toast building up on the nose. Intense, but not at all weighty, linear fruit, crisp, zesty, and full of life. Lovely, tapering length with fine acid line. Voluminous mousse adds creaminess to the finish. This is a classic blanc de blancs. *[Last year's Sparkling Wine Producer of the Year was up against serious competition, yet its bog-standard Non-Vintage—if any wine from Ferrari can be described as bog-standard—ran away with the World Champion Classic Blanc de Blancs Brut trophy. What an achievement.]*

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC ROSÉ BRUT

Louis Roederer 2010 Brut Rosé

Champagne, France
(75cl, 12.5%); 62% Pinot Noir,
38% Chardonnay (9g RS)

This adorably pale-peach concoction has such lovely, fresh, delicate, fragrant, peachy fruit aromas, with such subtle notes of toast and vanilla, that they completely mislead the taster, who will expect the palate to be equally delicate and fragrant on the palate, only to be rudely awoken by an explosion of fruit. This is, without doubt, an extremely classy sparkling wine, but its Pinot-dominated fruit is just so very rich that it comes as a bit of a shock! Thankfully, the explosion of rich fruit is so succulent and juicy that it enhances the wine's finesse, rather than working against it, and this is further reinforced by the tight, long, and lingering finish.

[Chef de cave Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon uses a unique method to produce this rosé. The Pinot Noir, from Hautvillers, is cold-soaked for just over one week. There is no crushing and no fermentation on the skins, since that would extract tannins, which is the last thing he wants. The Pinot Noir juice is drained off, and the more acidic Chardonnay juice is added. Because the Pinot Noir has been picked for ripeness, it needs the Chardonnay's acidity for balance, but this also helps stabilize the color. The temperature of the blend is then gently increased to encourage the first fermentation, approximately 20 percent of which is in 9,000-liter, well-used French oak foudres.]

WORLD CHAMPION BRUT FROM NON-CLASSIC GRAPE

Santa Digna Estelado Rosé NV Uva País

Secano Interior, Central Valley, Chile
(75cl, 12%); 100% País (8g RS)

An exquisitely pale peach color. Elegantly restrained nose, with cool strawberry fruit and an attractive lemony bite to it. Linear fruit fills to the mid-palate and carries well. *[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 topic it is CSWWC. That is why I awarded the first-ever Chairman's Trophy to a silver-medal wine made from the Nebbiolo grape (Cuvage Rosé), and now, with the reintroduction of the World Champion trophies, I have fleshed out the non-classic grape variety to an award in its own right. The winning wine can be any pure varietal classic style (blanc de blancs, blanc de noirs, or rosé); and brut includes any wine labeled or technically qualifying as brut nature, extra-brut, or brut. We define a non-classic grape as a variety not traditionally associated with a recognized brut-style sparkling wine, like Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Meunier in Champagne.]*

WORLD CHAMPION LIBRARY VINTAGE

Dom Pérignon Rosé 1995 P2

Champagne, France
(75cl, 12%); 42% Chardonnay, 58% Pinot Noir
(6.5g RS)

Deep copper color, with bronzed highlights. Absolutely beautiful Pinot aromas, with mellow, spiced-cherry complexity and notes of chocolate and forest-floor. Great exuberance of fruit on the palate. Positively vinous, with an intense, vibrant, and lingering richness. Firm, muscular, and full of life for its age, yet velvet-textured, with great focus and freshness, with a lovely, satisfying brut finish. *[P2 is the second phase of development when, says chef de cave Richard Geoffroy, Dom Pérignon starts to show what it is really made of. He believes there are three windows of opportunity, or "plenitudes," when any great Champagne will transcend into a distinctly different personality. For DP, the second plenitude (P2) usually takes place at 15–20 years, with at least 12 years in contact with the yeast lees. This is when DP is supposed to be at its peak of energy, and the 1995 rosé certainly demonstrates that. It is just bursting with life, and that is the quality that makes it such an easy winner of the Library Vintage Trophy.]*



CHAIRMAN'S TROPHY

MCIII by Moët & Chandon 001.14

Champagne, France
(75cl, 12.5%); 45% Pinot Noir, 45%
Chardonnay, 10% Meunier (5g RS)

An absolutely spellbinding blend of great reserve wines—immaculate. Full-on, soft, spicy, complex aromas of apricot, meadow flowers, and honey, with evolved pastry notes. Lovely spiciness, very complex, overflowing with reserve-wine mellowness and richness, caressed by the beautiful, velvety sweetness of mature wine. *[I chose MCIII for the Chairman's Trophy because it is uniquely outstanding. I gave it 20/20 and wrote just one word: "Wow!" So, you could say I liked it, but since we do not have a Library Non-Vintage category, MCIII would have gone unrewarded, and that would have been a crime. If any Champagne deserves a special honor, this is it, yet it might have been a different story... When MCIII was launched earlier this year, it was one of the few occasions when I approached a tasting with a certain prejudice. One thing bothered me: Why would Moët want to launch a prestige cuvée that is significantly more expensive than Dom Pérignon? Was Moët not worried that it could devalue the most famous Deluxe Champagne in history? As soon as I tasted it, however, I couldn't give a damn. I was bowled over, utterly convinced and totally seduced. MCIII is one of the greatest and most intriguing Champagnes I have ever tasted. Let Moët worry about conflicting levels of prestige—I am just happy that they have made this very special wine.]*

MCIII is a synthesis of seven Vintages and three storage environments: stainless-steel, oak, and glass. *(The III in MCIII represents the trinity of these three universes, as well as alluding to the third millennium.)* The base wine (37–40%) is an intense, well-structured 2003, fermented and aged in stainless-steel vats. To this, Grand Vintage blends (37–40%)—partially aged in large oak foudres and then preserved in stainless-steel vats—from 2002, 2000, and 1998 were added. Finally, Moët dipped deep into its cellars for bottles of Grand Vintage Collection 1999, 1998, and 1993 (20–26%), aged in bottle. This MCIII blend was rebottled and underwent a second fermentation (or third in the case of the Grand Vintage Collection).

The first attempt in 1998 (obviously without the later vintages) failed. Even Moët, with its unique experience of Esprit du Siècle (11 vintages spanning every decade of the 20th century) did not get MCIII right first time. In fact, MCIII 001.14 (meaning the first release, disgorged in 2014) was the third attempt.]



SPARKLING WINE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

As 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, so this award recognizes a producer rather than a specific winemaker.

Champagne Louis Roederer

When Ferrari entered nine wines last year and won an astonishing nine gold medals, I was amazed. I had never witnessed such a feat, not just at CSWWC but at any wine competition, and I promised to eat my hat if it were ever repeated. When I realized that Roederer had entered ten

wines and won ten gold medals this year, I was not amazed; I was in shock—and began tenderizing my hat. Sure, we love the Roederer style, but we have never given Roederer a clean sweep of golds before—and to give a clean sweep of golds for as many as ten entries defies imagination.

The house of Louis Roederer is run by Frédéric Rouzaud. His father Jean-Claude Rouzaud, now retired, was the cleverest, tightest head of house that Champagne has ever seen. Thanks to his aversion to borrowing from the bank, he gave his son the most cash-rich, most profitable platform in Champagne to build on. While other family-owned Champagne houses have had to hand over day-to-day control to professional managers from outside the family to compete in the cut and thrust of 21st-century commerce, Louis Roederer has gone from strength to strength under Frédéric Rouzaud—something that no doubt pleases his intrinsically tight-fisted father! Frédéric's greatest asset has been his working partnership with Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, who is not just in charge of the vineyards and winemaking but is also deputy CEO. Ultimately, financial success depends on quality and style—and the reputation this generates. Under Lécaillon, the quality has soared and the style has been honed. If pushed to articulate the style that pervades all of Louis Roederer's cuvées, it would be one of precision and purity, of intensity without weight, and an endlessly long, tapering finish. If I had billions and could afford to cellar as much Cristal and Cristal

Rosé as I liked, I would still buy magnums of Brut Premier and everything between. The Vintage Blanc de Blancs was once Roederer's best-kept secret; today it is better known yet remains this outstanding producer's greatest bargain.



THE SUPREME WORLD CHAMPION

All the National Trophies are tasted off against each other to find the most outstanding wine in the entire competition. In 2014, it was Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé; in 2015, it was Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé; and this year it is...

Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Brut (magnum)

See Best French Sparkling Wine above.



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