

Bubble bulletin: Notes from the 2017 CSWWC

Tom Stevenson reports on the state of sparkling wine worldwide as reflected by the Best in Class and trophies awarded at the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships

This year has been one of the most diverse and exciting Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships (CSWWC) yet. The number of countries participating in the competition continues to rise, with first-time entries from the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, and Romania. All three new-entry countries won silver medals, and on a pre-competition visit to Luxembourg I encountered a number of potential gold-medal winners, making it only a matter of time before we see that country strike gold.

I also made pre-competition visits to Germany, Alsace, Franciacorta, and Trentodoc. The number of individual wineries I can visit is always limited, but I encourage producers to submit as many wines as they like to a centralized tasting, which are sometimes blind, sometimes not. As these tastings are not part of the competition proper, it is not necessary to taste blind, but if the producers in any region prefer me to taste blind, that's fine by me. There is no charge, of course, and this allows winemakers to receive feedback for their entire range without the expense of entering every wine into the competition. Because this costs me money and takes up a lot of my time, I hope they enter into the spirit of things and use my feedback to be smart about which wines to enter into the competition, of course, whether that is in the form of new entrants or established entrants changing the wines they enter.

Obviously I can make no guarantees. My feedback is just the opinion of one judge—and every CSWWC medal is the decision of all three judges under totally blind conditions—but it is not an

ill-informed opinion, and my assessments have turned out to be fairly accurate. There is nothing more rewarding than spotting a potential gold-medal wine when tasting sparkling wines from a producer who has not yet been successful at the CSWWC, pointing at most of the wines and saying, "If you enter any of those, you will probably be wasting your money as you have in previous years, but if you enter that wine, you stand a very good chance of winning a gold."

Deciding which wines to enter into a relatively new and decidedly niche competition judged exclusively by specialists can be a bit puzzling for some producers. Naturally enough, we look for excellence. A producer might wonder, however, how we perceive such excellence, especially when, perhaps, his top cuvée never wins a medal yet his entry-level Non-Vintage consistently grabs a gold every year. The answer to this could be that he is trying too hard, and failing, to make a top-of-the-line cuvée, whereas without any intervention his vineyards might be providing a classic sparkling-wine structure and quality for his entry-level Non-Vintage. He could be convinced that his top cuvée is about complexity, whereas we might discern that complexity as simply too oxidative or evolved. There might, of course, be other reasons, and the only way to be sure is for me to taste through the entire range and provide feedback.

The bottom line is, however, that we seek excellence from every provenance in every style, and not just at the top of a line but at every available price point. Excellence and value have never been mutually exclusive.

How do we define excellence at the CSWWC? The amount of fruit and yeast-aged character will vary according to origin, grape variety, and style, but all sparkling wines should be long and linear to one degree or another. Within this general parameter, I personally look for elegance and finesse, with vitality most important in youthful wines, and graceful aging every bit as important as complexity in the more mature examples. The mousse should be smooth, never aggressive, and although a prerequisite of any sparkling wine, it should always play a supporting role and not obscure the wine itself. Finally, the holy grail for any winemaker, still or sparkling, has to be intensity without weight.

This is an oversimplification, of course. For many winemakers, my definition of excellence will be just so many words, and they might not understand now that they relate to their own wines. That is why it is so much easier to taste through a range with a winemaker and grade his wines, where applicable, as gold, silver, bronze, or no award, briefly explaining why in each case, either in person or by feedback from a centralized tasting. When doing this, I never trash any wines. If they are not faulty and if a producer has a loyal customer base happy to pay the asking price for such wines, why should I suggest he change them? But that producer deserves to know why they will never be successful at the CSWWC.

Availability

One question that several producers ask is about the availability of wines they enter into the CSWWC, and I cannot overemphasize how relaxed we are about availability. Unlike virtually every other wine competition in the world, the CSWWC has no draconian availability restrictions. There are no minimum production levels or stock availability. We demand only that the wines must be available for purchase somewhere. The CSWWC is a competition that seeks out the very best sparkling wines wherever they happen to be available and however restricted that availability is. If we find something special and only six bottles are available in the middle of nowhere, we expect that there will be at least one fanatical fizz geek who is willing to jump on a plane, drive 1,000 miles in a 4x4, or climb a mountain to buy the last bottle.

Features of the CSWWC

- It is open to sparkling wines of any style from every provenance.
- It is the only competition judged exclusively by world-renowned sparkling-wine specialists (Dr Tony Jordan, Essi Avellan MW, and me).
- Permanent reserve judge George Markus is one of the world's most knowledgeable and skilled Champagne tasters, and after four years shadowing every wine judged at the CSWWC, he is becoming one of the most experienced tasters of sparkling wines from all other origins.
- Every medal decision must be agreed by all three judges.
- All wines are tasted blind, according to origin and to style (blend, blanc de blancs, rosé, and so on) to ensure that each medal is evaluated in context.
- Every wine is conventionally assessed as gold, silver, bronze, commended, no award, possibly faulty, and definitely faulty, but of these we unconventionally recognize and award only gold and silver medals.
- For Deluxe Champagnes we recognize and award only gold medals (because at Deluxe Champagne prices, the consumer should expect nothing less than gold-medal quality).
- This is the only competition to judge future releases.
- Although we "consign bronze medals and commended wines to the dustbin of shame, along with the no awards that all other competitions put there," a bronze-medal wine will be of interest to the judges if it is from a producer located in an emerging region or a region that has established a reputation for other styles of wine but has very little history of sparkling-wine production. We believe that such bronze medals could be an indication of potential, which is why we have, on occasions, supplied a bronze-medal certificate, entirely at our own discretion, if this will help those we believe are seriously trying to excel against the odds.
- First unique quality control: A second bottle of all wines judged to be bronze or lower (silver or lower in the case of Deluxe Champagnes) will be opened by Orsi Szentkiralyi, who compares the bottle assessed by the judges to a second bottle. The panel calls for a second bottle of any wine suspected of



being faulty, but sometimes a lackluster wine shows no obvious fault as such (for example, a wine with fruit that has been “scalped” by TCA below the detection level). Orsi’s task is to look for bottle variation and, if she finds it, to insert the second “clean” bottle back into the tasting under a different code. In terms of the number of wines retasted, this is an enormous task but one we believe to be essential for fairness.

- Second unique quality control: All wines in clear-glass bottles are bagged in black plastic as soon as they are received and remain bagged up to and including tasting, a precaution that has eliminated almost all light-struck faults.
- In all, the CSWWC awarded 127 gold medals and 167 silver medals in 2017.

Fault finding

Do not be dismayed by this focus on faults. Sparkling wine has not suddenly become the world’s most fault-ridden wine style. I conducted a seminar on sparkling-wine faults following this year’s competition in conjunction with Plumptre and WineSkills, and where better to share its findings than *WFW*?

- **Light-struck** In recent times, light-struck taint has been by far the most common fault in sparkling wines of all provenances, due to the decline of TCA-infected corks and a steadily increasing number of clear-glass bottles. Last year I reported that, despite its prevalence on the shelf, light-struck faults had been almost entirely eradicated from the CSWWC thanks to our proactive clear-bottle protection policy. It still bewilders me that other wine competitions do not bother to bag clear-glass bottles on receipt, whether the wines are sparkling or still. At the CSWWC, this protection has meant that TCA or corked wine, although increasingly scarce in general, has again taken over as the primary identifiable fault. Despite this, at just 0.8% of the wines we taste, its occurrence is a far cry from the 1990s, when it affected 5–8% of all bottles. In 2017, we were surprised to discover the incidence of TCA had jumped from 0.8% in 2016, to 2.9%. We will not know for several years whether this is the start

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of a new trend or simply an anomaly, but even 2.9% is still very low compared to the 1990s, and there appears to be no rhyme or reason to the increase. It was not due to a specific producer or country, being randomly spread.

- **Brett** We had one distinctly “Bretty” wine this year. *Brettanomyces* is rarely mentioned in the context of sparkling wine. It is widely perceived as a high-pH red-wine fault that occurs in a winery, usually due to infected barrels. But white wines are not immune, and *Brettanomyces* is a wild yeast that is found naturally in vineyards all over the world, so it can be brought into the most pristine winery and play havoc. It is less likely to affect a sparkling wine because of its lower pH, but the necessary phenolic acid precursors are found in white grapes, as well as black. I knew that according to the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI), Brett had “been observed in sparkling base wines,” but I had never encountered it in base wines or the finished product until this year’s CSWWC. The AWRI also states that “Chardonnay is the white variety most frequently affected by Brett characters” and that white and sparkling wines “are more at risk of Brett spoilage if left exposed to oxygen or with minimal SO₂ handling”—natural-wine producers beware! The terms Brett and Bretty are quite misleading. It is not *Brettanomyces* we detect. The horsey, barnyard, sweaty-saddle, and Band-Aid aromas that typify this fault come from the volatile phenols that

are metabolized from phenolic acids via *Brettanomyces* spoilage. These defects are known as phenol off-flavors, or POFs for short, and even this technical term is misleading, because they are aromas not flavors.

- **Chlorine** This should be even more rare than Brett these days, since its use for bleaching corks prior to washing has been banned since 1997, but we did have one chlorine fault and, intriguingly, it came from Spain, the second-largest cork-producing country in the world.
- **Oxidative or oxidized?** As last year, we had just one definitively oxidized wine, although there were many with varying degrees of oxidativeness. To be precise, we encountered 111 wines that had an oxidative or aldehydic aroma to one degree or another. Oxidized is one thing, even if wines are hardly ever completely oxidized, but where do you draw the line between a wine that is technically correct but oxidative or aldehydic in the extreme, and one that is so oxidative that it must be considered faulty? And of those that are technically correct, how should this character affect how a wine is scored in a competitive tasting? The answer to this last question has to be by degrees, of course. As long as an oxidative or aldehydic aroma is negligible or at most secondary, we do not consider it to be much of a negative, but the more that acetaldehyde impinges on a wine, and the more it is robbed of its fruit, the lower our score will be. Of the three judges, Essi and I are the toughest on the oxidative character, whereas Tony is a little more forgiving, particularly when Pinot Noir features. It is true that Pinot Noir is a more oxidatively prone grape than Chardonnay, and a Pinot-based sparkling wine often has dried-fruit character that gradually develops into plum-pudding or Christmas-cake complexity with age, thus there are many occasions when the oxidative notes detected by Essi and me are, to Tony, merely a varietal characteristic of dried fruits. When I disagree, he has told me more than once that it was something he learned from me. I doubt that I have taught the good doctor anything, although he has

surely taught me much. (As one journalist put it recently, he is so easy to listen to, and I have been listening to him for almost 30 years.) It is good that the three of us can have these conversations on where we should draw the line between what we perceive as the varietal, stylistic, approaching extreme, and distinctly faulty levels of oxidative or aldehydic character. It ensures we are never complacent. In the final analysis, 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. At the other extreme, where the oxidative note is relatively light and the fruit in a sparkling wine is bursting with gold-medal quality of beauty and elegance, we will recognize that. The same wine without its light oxidative note might be an even better gold, but we cannot allow that to prejudice what is nevertheless gold-medal

quality in its own right. In fact, of those 111 discernibly oxidative wines, we awarded five golds and 17 silvers.

■ **Malo or lactic?** In addition to reducing acidity levels, the only other noticeable effect of malolactic fermentation (MLF) should be purely textural, ideally providing a creaminess on the mid-palate that carries through to the finish. The last thing you should notice when first putting your nose to any wine is a winemaking technique, and that applies particularly to MLF in sparkling wine. This is why in Champagne they developed an MLF cocktail of bacteria that minimizes the level of diacetyl produced. Diacetyl is used in the food industry as an artificial flavorant that gives, for example, non-butter spreads an utterly buttery aroma. We tasted 45 wines that had varying degrees of MLF, including one that was like rich, creamy fudge, and another that was pure butterscotch. Both aromas might well have been heavenly if found in a milkshake, but not in a

classic, bottle-fermented sparkling wine. What is the difference between a malo wine and a lactic one? I use malo as a relatively positive term, even when too rich and buttery, whereas lactic is decidedly negative, inferring a sourness—from sour milk, to sour cream, baby sick, and other regurgitations. Of the 45 wines, only four could be described as lactic.

The results

I say this every year, but someone always seeks clarification, so I am doomed to repeat that if any award-winning wine is a magnum, we mean precisely that; we are awarding the magnum, not the 75cl bottle. If you buy the bottle equivalent of such a wine, you are likely to be disappointed unless the 75cl also happens to have won the same award (there are very few examples). To those who see a gold awarded to a magnum of a wine they have not rated highly in the past, I say, do not dismiss the result out of hand. Be big enough to buy a 75cl bottle and a magnum, then taste them side by side with an open mind.



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BEST IN CLASS

All the wines in the competition are initially evaluated by origin and by style, to ensure that their medal potential is assessed according to typicity of provenance, rather than some international yardstick. Within each category of origin, the wines are tasted by style (for example, all the *brut nature* together, all the blanc de blancs, 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.

ARGENTINA

This country has not stood out in the past, and although we have tasted this particular rosé in the competition before, we were surprised by its quality this year. A big jump up. Could this be a dark horse in the World Champion trophies?

Chandon NV Rosé

Best in Class Argentine Rosé

AUSTRALIA

Because Australia is such a steady performer, it can be unfairly dismissed as not going anywhere fast, but perhaps that is because it had already arrived where it should have been ten years before the rest of the New World. Unlike Italy, this country may not be doubling its gold medals year on year, but the quality that comes through clearly at the very top is not just rock solid, but exciting. Chandon Australia started up later than Domaine Chandon in the USA but quickly overtook it in terms of quality and consistency. At the House of Arras, and with many other brands under his belt as well, the maestro who is Ed Carr remains one of the world's most highly awarded sparkling-wine makers. It is surprising that the Burch Family's Madfish and Howard Park (Jeté) sparkling wines are so far below the radar because they always excel at the CSWWC. Taltarni and Clover Hill, its autonomous Tasmanian operation, regularly win at least one Best in Class every year. But perhaps the biggest surprise of all is the Minchinbury Prestige, a Chardonnay/Pinot Noir blend that retails for A\$10, or £6. That's cheap

by any standard—and in 2017 it was also a great value.

Chandon 2012 Blanc de Blancs

Best in Class Australian Blanc de Blancs

Clover Hill NV Cuvée Rosé

Best in Class Australian Non-Vintage Rosé

House of Arras 2001 Blanc de Blancs (future release)

Best in Class Australian Future Release

House of Arras 2008 Grand Vintage

Best in Class Australian Vintage Brut Blend

Howard Park Wines NV Jeté Brut Blanc

Best in Class Australian Non-Vintage Brut Blend

Minchinbury NV Prestige

Best Value Australian Sparkling Wine

Taltarni 2011 Tache

Best in Class Australian Vintage Rosé

CHINA

This is the second consecutive year that China has won a gold medal, both from Domaine Chandon—last year for its Non-Vintage rosé, this year for its classic brut blend. Chandon chose virgin territory in the Helan Mountain foothills of Ningxia, and the performance of these two wines, when no other Chinese wines have come remotely close to challenging them, demonstrates the potential of that new terroir. If there are any Chinese sparkling wines we have not yet tasted willing to throw their hat in the ring, we would love to put them to the test!

Chandon NV Brut

Best in Class Chinese Brut Blend

ENGLAND

We will change the heading to UK if and when we find a medal-winner from Wales. (*Dewch ymlaen, Cymru!*) In the meantime, its name remains forever England, and what a roll English sparkling wines are on! It is hard to believe that only 20 years ago English wine was a joke—until the first commercial vintage of Nyetimber was served at Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Anniversary Lunch, and the notion of this country's world-class potential for sparkling wine was born. The only problem was that, except at Nyetimber, there were no Chardonnay or Pinot Noir vines in the ground, thus ten years would go by and there would be only two more sparkling-wine producers of interest as far as I was concerned: Ridgeview, which the late and hugely missed Mike Roberts had firmly established as the second most important producer in the country; and Camel Valley, whose Pinot Noir Rosé was making a name for itself. Then a number of promising new ventures began to spring up and the hype began. When asked about the unexpected success of English sparkling wine—not just in terms of quality, but the price asked and, indeed, received as recently as five years ago—I would try to explain that it had been built on the efforts of a relatively small number of

exceedingly high-quality producers and that not all English sparkling wine was world-class. There were perhaps six names that were world-class and maybe another six that made a cuvée here and there that could rise to the challenge. That was five years ago. Now there are 12 actual and 12 potential world-class producers in this country, all with Chardonnay and Pinot vines planted since the new millennium.

Alder Ridge Vineyard 2013 Blanc de Noirs

Best in Class English Blanc de Noirs

Harrow and Hope 2014 Brut Rosé

Best in Class English Vintage Rosé

Hattingley 2011 Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Best in Class English Blanc de Blancs
Best in Class English Magnum

Nyetimber 2009 Classic Cuvée (Jéroboam)

Best in Class English Brut Blend

Plumpton Estate NV The Dean Blush

Best in Class English Non-Vintage Rosé
Best Value English Sparkling Wine

FRANCE

Why is it that sparkling wine has improved so dramatically all over the world but not in France? Champagne is of course the exception, but the quality of French sparkling wine beyond its borders has mystifyingly stood still for more than 30 years. There could not be a better time for French producers to take advantage of the new respect for sparkling wine, which is no longer an occasional celebratory wine but is consumed on a regular basis at the table with food. If French producers joined this revolution, it would generate renewed global interest in French alternatives to Champagne, but such a revolution literally starts from the ground up, with vineyards planted and trained specifically for sparkling wine. That won't happen until the appellation laws demand it, and that simply isn't happening. Bouvet's Best in Class for its entry-level Non-Vintage demonstrates that it can be done, but the fact that, like last year, the CSWWC found only one Best in Class outside of Champagne, illustrates that without an appellational kick up the backside French sparkling wine of world-class quality remains as rare as hen's teeth. (Appellational: Is that even a word?) However, if Champagne was a country, it would still easily top the charts with 51 gold medals, even if this is a significant drop from its 69 gold peak in 2017. Because the CSWWC really does get all the best Champagnes that other competitions would love to have, this drop can probably be put down to the unfortunately high level of 2010-based Non-Vintage cuvées we received this year.

Bouvet NV Saumur Brut

Best in Class Loire NV Brut

Alain Thiénot 2008 Cuvée Garance

Best in Class Champagne Vintage Blanc de Noirs

AR Lenoble 2008 Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Chouilly Millésime (magnum)

Best in Class Low- or No-Dosage Champagne

Charles Heidsieck NV Rosé Réserve

Best in Class Champagne Non-Vintaged Rosé

Dom Pérignon 1998 P2 (magnum)

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Vintaged Blend

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Magnum
Best Deluxe Champagne

Dom Pérignon 2002 P2 (future release)

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Future Release

Les Pionniers 2008 Vintage Brut

Best Supermarket Champagne

Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Brut Rosé Millésime (magnum)

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Rosé

Louis Roederer 2009 Cristal Brut Rosé Millésime

Best in Class Biodynamic Champagne

Louis Roederer 2010 Blanc de Blancs

Best in Class Champagne Vintaged Blanc de Blancs

Louis Roederer 2010 Brut Rosé Millésime (magnum)

Best in Class Champagne Vintaged Rosé

Louis Roederer NV Brut Premier (magnum)

Best in Class Non-Vintaged Brut Blend

Maison Perrier-Jouët 2004 Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Blanc de Blancs

Moët & Chandon NV MCIII (magnum)

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Multivintage Brut

Palmer & Co NV Blanc de Noirs (magnum)

Best in Class Champagne Non-Vintaged Blanc de Noirs

Palmer & Co NV Brut Réserve (magnum)

Best Value Champagne

Piper-Heidsieck 2008 Vintage

Best in Class Vintaged Brut Blend
Best Non Deluxe Champagne

Ruinart NV Blanc de Blancs

Best in Class Champagne Non-Vintage Blanc de Blancs

ITALY

After France—by which I mean essentially Champagne for all practical purposes—Italy is without doubt the second most successful sparkling-wine country in the world. Ever since our very first competition three years ago,

Franciacorta and Trentodoc have battled it out for top honors, with success alternating with each year. In 2014 Franciacorta triumphed, in 2015 it was Trentodoc, in 2016 it swung back to Franciacorta, and this year Trentodoc smashed all records by winning 19 golds to Franciacorta's ten! One day very soon, these two premier regions will almost certainly be joined by Alta Langa, but it is already fascinating to observe how Franciacorta and Trentodoc can produce such distinctly different styles of superb-quality sparkling wine when their boundaries are merely 25 miles (40km) apart. Trentodoc certainly deserves to be promoted to a DOCG, like Franciacorta (as, indeed, does Alta Langa), but I wonder whether the artificial construction of the Trento+doc name has perhaps scuppered all chances of promotion.

Fratelli Berlucchi 2010 Casa Delle Colonne Brut Riserva (future release)

Best in Class Franciacorta Future Release

Berlucchi NV Satèn '61 (magnum)

Best in Class Franciacorta Non-Vintaged Blanc de Blancs
Best in Class Franciacorta Magnum
Best Franciacorta

Berlucchi NV Brut '61 (magnum)

Best in Class Franciacorta Non-Vintaged Brut Blend

Mirabella NV Rosé

Best in Class Franciacorta Non-Vintaged Rosé

Ca' del Bosco 2012 Vintage Collection Satèn (magnum)

Best in Class Franciacorta Vintaged Blanc de Blancs

Lantieri 2010 Riserva Origines

Best in Class Franciacorta Vintaged Brut Blend

Lantieri 2012 Arcadia Brut Millesimato

Best Value Franciacorta

Quadra 2010 Quvée 55 (Magnum)

Best in Class Low- or No-Dosage Franciacorta

Ca' del Bosco 2007 Cuvée Annamaria Clementi Rosé

Best in Class Franciacorta Vintaged Rosé

Cantina Aldeno 2013 Altinum Brut (future release)

Best in Class Trentodoc Future Release

Ferrari NV Maximum Brut Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Best in Class Trentodoc Non-Vintaged Blanc de Blancs

Ferrari NV Maximum Rosé

Best in Class Trentodoc Non-Vintaged Rosé

Maso Martis 2011 Millésime Brut Riserva (magnum)

Best in Class Trentodoc Vintaged Brut
Best in Class Trentodoc Magnum
Best Trentodoc

Ferrari 2008 Riserva Lunelli Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Best in Class Low- or No-Dosage Trentodoc

Ferrari 2010 Perlé Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Best in Class Trentodoc Vintaged Blanc de Blancs

Rotari 2013 Brut USA

Best Value Trentodoc

Ferrari 2008 Perlé Nero Riserva Blanc de Noirs (magnum)

Best in Class Trentodoc Blanc de Noirs

Ferrari 2010 Perlé Rosé Riserva (magnum)

Best in Class Trentodoc Vintaged Rosé

Nino Franco NV Rustico

Best in Class Prosecco Non-Vintaged Brut

Conte Collalto NV Collalto Extra Dry

Best in Class Prosecco Non-Vintaged Extra Sec

Astoria NV Arzana Cartizze Dry

Best in Class Prosecco Non-Vintaged Sec

Nino Franco 2016 Vigneto Della Riva di San Floriano

Best in Class Prosecco Vintaged Brut

Astoria 2016 Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore DOCG Millesimato

Best in Class Prosecco Vintaged Extra Sec

Andreola 2016 Millesimato

Best Value Prosecco DOCG

Nino Franco 2016 Primo Franco

Best in Class Prosecco Vintaged Sec

Tenuta Scarpa Colombi NV Roberto Colombi Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Best in Class Other Italian Blanc de Blancs

NEW ZEALAND

Once again, Tony Jordan was replaced by George Markus for the judging of these wines. Tony consults in other countries, too, of course, but he felt that the New Zealand sparkling-wine community is too small for him to judge when he is intimately involved with two medal-winning producers, Hunter's and Akarua. The odds that he would know what he was tasting would be too great, and although he could and would be totally objective, the CSWWC judging process must not only be, but be seen to be, above reproach. Tony therefore stood aside and George took his place—and Hunter's still triumphed! In fact, this year Hunter's was the only New Zealand producer with Best in Class wines. Pelorus, No. 1 Family Estate, and Akarua have all won Best in Class awards in previous years, and there are others who are equally capable. Once more I call on Pernod-Ricard to change its Deutz Marlborough brand to Mumm Marlborough and enter its wines into the competition. I love Champagne Deutz, but they have not owned Deutz Marlborough since 2005. How daft is it that Pernod-Ricard

should sell its products under a competitor's brand for well over ten years?

Hunter's NV MiruMiru™

Best in Class New Zealand Non-Vintaged Brut

Hunter's 2013 MiruMiru™ Reserve

Best in Class New Zealand Vintaged Brut

SOUTH AFRICA

The bubbly and irrepressible Peter Ferreira is widely recognized as South Africa's best sparkling-wine producer and has won the Best South African Sparkling Wine trophy twice, but he is not the only *cap classique* producer capable of world-class quality, as Avondale demonstrated in 2016. Klein Constantia has also been in the running in two previous years and this year it is the only *cap classique* to pick up a Best in Class award.

Klein Constantia 2013 Brut

Best in Class Cap Classique Blanc de Blancs
Best Cap Classique

SPAIN

There is no doubt that the quality of Cava and other Spanish sparkling wines has rocketed in recent years, and this has been reflected in the increasing number of medals won at the CSWWC since its inception, particularly last year when we awarded 11 golds and 18 silvers. Without lessening the well-deserved glory of this year's winners, it is puzzling to see Spain's performance plummet to just six golds and seven silvers in 2017. That's one less silver than in our very first year. I will have to hotfoot it to Barcelona to find out why!

Castellroig 2010 La Finca Sabaté I Coca Reserva Familiar Brut Nature

Best in Class Low- or No-Dosage Cava

Gramona 2009 III Lustrós

Best in Class Cava Vintaged Brut

Oriol Rosell 2015 Oriol Rosell Brut Cuvée Especial

Best Value Cava

Vilarnau NV Vilarnau Brut Reserva

Best in Class Cava Non-Vintaged Brut

USA

Although it's true that we receive most of our entries from California, producers from New York State, Michigan, New Mexico, and Oregon have all entered the competition. It is not surprising from numbers alone that California always rises to the top, but it is pretty impressive that the same two producers, Roederer Estate and Caraccioli, fight it out for the Best US Sparkling Wine.

Caraccioli Cellars 2010 Brut Cuvée

Best in Class California Brut Blend

Caraccioli Cellars 2010 Brut Rosé

Best in Class California Vintaged Rosé

Roederer Estate NV Rosé

Best in Class California Non-Vintaged Rosé



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 medal, no Regional Champion is awarded.

FRANCE: CHAMPAGNE

Dom Pérignon 1998 P2 (magnum)

Best Champagne

FRANCE: LOIRE

Bouvet NV Saumur Brut

Best Loire Sparkling Wine

ITALY: FRANCIACORTA

Berlucchi NV Satèn '61 (magnum)

Best Franciacorta

ITALY: PROSECCO

Astoria NV Arzana Cartizze Dry

Best Prosecco

ITALY: TRENTODOC

Maso Martis 2011 Millésime Brut Riserva (magnum)

Best Trentodoc

SOUTH AFRICA: CAP CLASSIQUE

Klein Constantia 2013 Brut

Best Cap Classique

SPAIN: CAVA

Vilarnau NV Vilarnau Brut Reserva

Best Cava

USA: CALIFORNIA

Roederer Estate NV Rosé

Best California Sparkling Wine

There is no doubt that the quality of Cava and other Spanish sparkling wines has rocketed in recent years, and this has been reflected in the increasing number of medals won at the CSWWC since its inception



NATIONAL CHAMPION TROPHIES

If there are no recognized sparkling-wine regions, all 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 medal, no National Champion is awarded.

BEST ARGENTINE SPARKLING WINE

Contender: Chandon NV Rosé

Winner:

Chandon Argentina NV Rosé

Mendoza (75cl, 12.5%); 63% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 4% Malbec (6g RS)

Best in Class Argentine Rose

Best Argentine Sparkling Wine

Nice peachy color with bronze tints and a fine bead. Lovely, delicate, fruity aromas with a touch of vanilla. Fresh yet nicely evolved toasty-fruit aromas on the palate. Plush, mellow and stylish, with a skilfully judged soft brut finish. Quite the most remarkable Argentine sparkling wine we have tasted over the years.

BEST AUSTRALIAN SPARKLING WINE

Contenders: Chandon 2012 Blanc de Blancs; Clover Hill NV Cuvée Rosé; House of Arras 2008 Grand Vintage; Howard Park NV Jeté Brut Blanc; Minchinbury NV Prestige; Taltarni 2011 Tache

Winner:

Howard Park Wines NV Jeté Brut Blanc

Great Southern (75cl, 12%); 91% Chardonnay, 9% Pinot Noir (7.6g RS)

Best in Class Australian Non-Vintaged Brut Blend

Soft, fresh, and enticing aroma, nicely evolved. Fresh, zingy Chardonnay fruit with a refreshing acid-line, intense yeast-complexed fruit, and a firm brut finish. Ready to drink but will age.

BEST CHINESE SPARKLING WINE

Contender: Chandon NV Brut

Winner:

Chandon China NV Brut

Helan Mountain's East Foothills, Ningxia (75cl, 12.5%); 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir (10g RS)

Best in Class Chinese Brut Blend

Stylish, perfumed, lightly toasty aromas lead

to the palate, which has good fruit but nicely restrained. Soft mousse, with some Chandon gunpowder. Very gentle, with a good middle weight that carries well to a soft brut finish.

BEST ENGLISH SPARKLING WINE

Contenders: Alder Ridge Vineyard 2013 Blanc de Noirs; Harrow and Hope 2014 Brut Rosé; Hattingley 2011 Blanc de Blancs (magnum); Nyetimber 2009 Classic Cuvée (Jéroboam); Plumpton Estate NV The Dean Blush
Winner:

Nyetimber 2009 Classic Cuvée (Jéroboam)

West Sussex (75cl, 12%); 55% Chardonnay, 26% Pinot Noir, 19% Meunier (9g RS)

Best in Class English Brut Blend

Best English Sparkling Wine

Classy pastry notes on the nose with lots of built-in complexity. So youthful on the palate, which is impressively linear, brimming with zesty, succulent, creamy fruit that is beautifully balanced, with a long and impressively yeast-complexed finish. Obviously great vineyard fruit, but also extremely smart winemaking.

BEST FRENCH SPARKLING WINE

Contenders: BEST CHAMPAGNE: Dom Pérignon 1998 P2 (magnum); BEST LOIRE: Bouvet NV Saumur Brut
Winner:

Dom Pérignon 1998 P2 (magnum)

Champagne (150cl, 12%); 55% Chardonnay, 45% Pinot Noir (6.5g RS)

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Vintage Blend

Best in Class Deluxe Champagne Magnum

Mind-blowing, glacially aged, yeast-complexed aromas of extraordinary finesse. So wonderfully fresh and vibrant on the palate. Smooth and surprising linear for such a complex Champagne. Long, fine, and persistent. Exquisite mousse. Impeccable class. Absolutely stunning!

BEST ITALIAN SPARKLING WINE

Contenders: BEST FRANCIACORTA: Berlucchi NV Satèn '61 (magnum); BEST PROSECCO: Astoria NV Arzana Cartizze Dry; BEST TRENTODOC: Maso Martis 2011 Millésime Brut Riserva (magnum); BEST OTHER ITALIAN: Tenuta Scarpa Colombi NV Roberto Colombi Blanc de Blancs (magnum)
Winner:

Maso Martis 2011 Millésime Brut Riserva (magnum)

Trentodoc, Trentino-Alto Adige (150cl, 12.5%); 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir (7g RS)

Best in Class Trentodoc Vintage Brut

Best in Class Trentodoc Magnum

Best Trentodoc

Very stylish, elegant, lees-complexed, toasty aromas. Classic lean structure with oodles of pristine fruit on the palate, which is so light, yet intense, with long finish and complex notes of toast, yeast-complexity and pencil shavings.

BEST NEW ZEALAND SPARKLING WINE

Contenders: Hunter's NV MiruMiru™ & Hunter's 2013 MiruMiru™ Reserve
Winner:

Hunter's 2013 MiruMiru™ Reserve

Marlborough (75cl, 12.5%); 62% Pinot Noir, 33% Chardonnay, 5% Meunier (6g RS)

Best in Class New Zealand Vintage Brut

Fresh, mellow, Pinot-driven red-fruit aromas on the nose, with ripe and candied complexing notes. A substantial and satisfying palate of lovely, fresh, and succulent fruit that is toasty and rich, yet also fine and zesty, and not in the slightest too heavy, thanks to its long, crisp, dry finish.

BEST SOUTH AFRICAN SPARKLING WINE

Contender: Klein Constantia 2013 Brut
Winner:

Klein Constantia 2013 Brut

Cap Classique, Constantia (75cl, 11.7%); 100% Chardonnay (7.4g RS)

Best in Class Cap Classique Blanc de Blancs

Best Cap Classique

Best South African Sparkling Wine

Classy yeast-complexed fruit aromas with stylish, toasty notes. Excellent Chardonnay structure with fresh, ripe, easy-drinking fruit that glides to crisp brut finish. Fine in length and concentration, without any heaviness.

BEST SPANISH SPARKLING WINE

Contender: BEST CAVA: Vilarnau NV Vilarnau Brut Reserva
Winner:

Vilarnau NV Vilarnau Brut Reserva

DO Cava, Cataluña (75cl, 11.5%); 50% Macabeo, 35% Parellada, 15% Xarel-lo (10g RS)

Best in Class Cava Non-Vintage Brut

Best Cava

Fresh, attractive, spicy aroma (almost oaky, one judge said), with good weight and length on the palate, which is very well balanced, with lovely fresh, gentle fruit, and nice white-pepper twist.

BEST US SPARKLING WINE

Contender: BEST CALIFORNIA: Roederer Estate NV Rosé
Winner:

Roederer Estate NV Rosé

Anderson Valley, California (75cl, 12%); 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay (12g RS)

Best in Class California Non-Vintage Rosé

Best California Sparkling Wine

Pink-rosé color with bronze hues. Lovely complex nose, with delicate yet intense aromas. Beautiful. Layer after layer of super elegant red fruits of some complexity. A truly lovely *assemblage* of yeast-complexed fruit.



WORLD CHAMPION BY STYLE

Every appropriate Best in Class in the competition each year also competes for the title of World Champion by Style in eight select sparkling-wine categories. Unusually, only four World Champions by Style have been awarded this year; there were no winners in the categories of Library Vintage, Aromatic, Red or Non-Classic Grape Variety.

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC NV BRUT BLEND

Contenders: AUSTRALIA: Howard Park Wines NV Jeté Brut Blanc; CHINA: Chandon China NV Brut; LOIRE: Bouvet NV Saumur Brut; CHAMPAGNE: Louis Roederer NV Brut Premier (magnum); FRANCIACORTA: Berlucchi NV Brut '61 (magnum); NEW ZEALAND: Hunter's NV MiruMiru™; CAVA: Vilarnau NV Vilarnau Brut Reserva
Winner:

Louis Roederer NV Brut Premier (magnum)

Champagne (150cl, 12%); 40% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay, 20% Meunier (10g RS)

Best in Class Non-Vintage Brut Blend

This is clearly super-reductive in style. It offers lovely, super-refined, pure fruit aromas underscored by perfumed toast. Long, restrained, and elegant, with super-refined, pristine fruit on the palate. Succulent, with great minerality and a mouthwatering acid line that stretches the length almost endlessly, supported by an appealing, caressing mousse and driven by super-reductive linearity, which tapers to a nicely dry finish. How can this be "only" a Non-Vintage Champagne?

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC VINTAGED BRUT BLEND

Contenders: AUSTRALIA: House of Arras 2008 Grand Vintage; ENGLAND: Nyetimber 2009 Classic Cuvée (Jéroboam); CHAMPAGNE: Piper-Heidsieck 2008 Vintage; FRANCIACORTA: Lantieri 2010 Riserva Origines; TRENTODOC: Maso Martis 2011 Brut Riserva (magnum); NEW ZEALAND: Hunter's 2013 MiruMiru™ Reserve; CAVA: Gramona 2009 III Lustrós; CALIFORNIA: Caraccioli Cellars 2010 Brut Cuvée
Winner:

Piper-Heidsieck 2008 Vintage

Champagne (75cl, 12.3%);
55% Pinot Noir, 45% Chardonnay (9.4g RS)

Best in Class Vintaged Brut Blend

Best Non-Deluxe Champagne

Gorgeous toasty aromas pushing through with instant charm. Firm and feisty on the palate, which is loaded with beautiful, yeast-complexed fruit and gunpowdery-toasty notes. Long and assertive on the finish. A classic Vintage Champagne of uncompromising quality, style, and longevity.

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT

Contenders: AUSTRALIA: Chandon 2012 Blanc de Blancs; ENGLAND: Hattingley 2011 Blanc de Blancs (magnum); CHAMPAGNE: Ruinart NV Blanc de Blancs; CHAMPAGNE: Louis Roederer 2010 Blanc de Blancs; FRANCIACORTA: Ca' del Bosco 2012 Vintage Collection Satèn (magnum); FRANCIACORTA: Berlucchi NV Satèn '61 (magnum); TRENTODOC: Ferrari NV Maximum Brut Blanc de Blancs (magnum); TRENTODOC: Ferrari 2010 Perlé Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Winner:

Hattingley 2011 Blanc de Blancs (magnum)

Hampshire (150cl, 12%); 100% Chardonnay (9g RS)

Best in Class English Blanc de Blancs

Best in Class English Magnum

Gorgeous, slowly evolved, toasty fruit on the nose, aromas that come across as being both classic and classy. Crisp and linear on the palate, with intense fruit and a great acid-line that carries through into a full-flavored brut finish.

WORLD CHAMPION CLASSIC ROSÉ BRUT

Contenders: ARGENTINA: Rose Chandon Argentina NV Rosé; AUSTRALIA: Clover Hill NV Cuvée Rosé; AUSTRALIA: Taltarni 2011 Tache; ENGLAND: Plumpton Estate NV The Dean Blush; CHAMPAGNE: Charles Heidsieck NV Rosé Réserve; CHAMPAGNE: Louis Roederer 2010 Brut Rosé (magnum); FRANCIACORTA: Mirabella NV Rosé; FRANCIACORTA: Ca' del Bosco 2007 Cuvée Annamaria Clementi Rosé; TRENTODOC: Ferrari NV Maximum Rosé; TRENTODOC: Ferrari 2010 Perlé Rosé Riserva (magnum); CALIFORNIA: Roederer Estate NV Rosé; CALIFORNIA: Caraccioli Cellars 2010 Brut Rosé

Winner:

Chandon Argentina NV Rosé

See under Argentine National Trophy

SPECIAL TROPHIES

Before revealing the Supreme World Champion for 2017, there are two other awards that deserve special attention and some discussion: Sparkling Wine Producer of the Year and Chairman's Trophy.



CHAIRMAN'S TROPHY

I am going to award a trophy and take a pop at the same time! Those who are aware of my views on sparkling wine know how much I dislike oxidative aromas, since not only are they contrary to the essentially reductive style of a sparkling wine, they also rob it of fruit. I do not refer to the oxidative methods used for the base wines, such as barrel-fermentation. Krug and Alfred Gratien are supreme examples of the pristine quality of fruit that can come from barrel. I am concerned about what producers do or, more often, do not do at bottling and disgorgement. Sparkling wines are essentially reductive wines because the second fermentation removes oxygen, and the time spent on lees is entirely anaerobic. Any producer wanting to make such wines in a deliberately oxidative style is as irrational as a producer in Jerez wanting to make a deliberately reductive style of Sherry. Yet oxidative sparkling wine has become fashionable, particularly in Champagne, where some producers claim it is a legitimate style and a few critics lap it up.

The recipient of this year's Chairman's Trophy is not one of the most prominent producers of oxidative Champagne, but he has told journalists, "Our style of blanc de blancs is oxidative," and his own website claims that the "oxidative notes [come] from four years on lees." When I visited him, he confessed that he was a little apprehensive because he knew my views, but when I tasted a magnum that had no oxidative aromas, he said, "Well, of course, in magnum the wine is always fresher and better. Everyone knows that." So, this award does not go to the successfully oxidative 75cl bottle but to the utter failure that is its magnum. And since it was the same wine that went into both formats, and he acknowledges that the magnum is "fresher and better," he must ask himself what style he really intended when he made the base wine. Which one is the success and which is the failure?

AR Lenoble 2008 Grand Cru Chouilly (magnum)

Champagne (150cl, 12.5%); 100% Chardonnay (3g RS)

Best in Class Low- or No-Dosage Champagne

A delicate and pretty fruitiness on the nose, with very slowly evolving toast-complexed aromas and a flick of vanilla, this is a deliciously fresh, serious, and complex Chardonnay with lovely, pristine elegance of fruit on the finish. Vibrant, rich, and ripe. Lovely.



SPARKLING WINE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

This trophy is awarded to the most successful wine producer in the competition. When Ferrari Lunelli entered nine wines in 2015 and won an astonishing nine gold medals, I had never witnessed such a feat and promised to eat my hat at the next Awards Dinner if it was ever repeated. In 2016 Roederer entered ten wines, won ten gold medals, and I duly ate my hat. Even though it was made from rice-paper, it was not a pleasant experience, thus no reckless promises were made that year. Wisely, as it turned out, since Ferrari Lunelli walked away this year with a mind-boggling 11 gold medals, three silver medals, and no fewer than six Best in Class awards.

The first sparkling wine in Trentino was produced by Giulio Ferrari in 1902. In 1952, he sold his business to Bruno Lunelli, a lifelong friend and, like Ferrari, a self-made man who ran a wine shop in Trento. Ferrari had no children, and although he had many cash offers for his business, he preferred to let Lunelli pay him in installments over many years. He was making just 9,000 bottles a year, but under the third generation of the Lunelli family (Matteo, Camilla, Marcello, and Alessandro) it is producing more than 4.5 million.



SUPREME WORLD CHAMPION

All National Trophies are tasted against each other to find the most outstanding wine in the competition. Previous winners have been Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Rosé (2014), Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé (2015), and Louis Roederer 2002 Cristal Brut in magnum (2016).

Dom Pérignon 1998 P2 (magnum)

See Best French Sparkling Wine above

CHAMPAGNE
Nicolas Feuillatte
FRANCE



Enchanter la vie
Enchanting life

GILLONDRES - Photographie : Etienne Usdin

TREAT ALCOHOL RESPONSIBLY - THINK OF YOUR HEALTH - DRINK SENSIBLY