



CSWWC 2020: Judging bubbles in a bubble

The Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships found a way to thrive in unprecedented circumstances, says Tom Stevenson, as he reports on the news, views, and trophies behind the most recent edition

The judging for the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships (CSWWC) was postponed from its usual May–June slot until October–November in 2020. While there is no doubt that a sunny September would have been a better, later choice, with more uplifting weather and probably the most relaxed period the country had seen since the beginning of the pandemic, future plans can never be made with the benefit of hindsight. In March, the priority was to delay the judging for as long as possible, and October–

November was as late as we could go.

It did not take a crystal ball, however, to realize that our normal practice of staying at one hotel and judging at another for a solid two weeks posed an unacceptable risk of infection. Even with the best anti-Covid measures strictly adhered to 24/7, it is not possible to eliminate risk wherever the public has access, only to minimize it. Yet risk was not the deciding factor, which was, rather, the fact that no hotel could guarantee it would even be open on any given future dates.

We needed an alternative, risk-free solution, with guaranteed availability. One of the advantages of a niche competition like the CSWWC is that we do not have hundreds of judges and a battalion of logistical and administrative staff to contend with. For us, it was not a big deal to form our own “bubbly bubble” that could be cut off from the outside world. We just had to find somewhere suitable, and that is how and why we all stayed and judged at The Stables at Merrieweathers, an isolated country estate on the border between Sussex and Kent.

Photography courtesy of CSWWC

A stable environment

If we were going to lock everybody away for a fortnight, they had to feel pampered rather than imprisoned. Set within its own 50 acres (20ha) of grounds that we could roam through but not leave, The Stables at Merrieweathers achieved just that. There was a heated swimming pool, a tennis court, outdoor barbecue, a lake to fish in, and even a private pub, The Cock & Bull, where we could chill out Australian-style after judging. It must have been the only pub in the UK where it was legal for customers to order a pint without eating a Scotch egg. There was pool, bar billiards, and darts. We had two beers on tap: Level Best, from the local Rother Valley Brewery, and the very hoppy Independence, from the Bristol Beer Factory in my neck of the woods. We enjoyed both, in and of themselves, but (CAMRA purists should look away now) being sparkling-wine specialists, it was not long before we were all blending the two!

There were two kitchens for our live-in, former Michelin-starred chef Roger Jones, who has been a CSWWC ambassador for three years. He was not allowed in the main kitchen during the day, as it was needed for Karl Franz and Donald MacKenzie of Sensible Wine Services (SWS), our logistics partners, who were also part of our lockdown bubble. They needed the main kitchen for servicing the judging flights, but Roger performed gastronomic miracles for breakfast and lunch in the second kitchen. This was housed in The Hayloft, across the "road" in a separate building, which conveniently removed any possibility of cooking smells interfering with the judging.

If it had been a heavy night and too many stragglers were slow to appear for breakfast, the perpetually bright-eyed and bushy-tailed Roger would send out a WhatsApp message: "Morning campers, breakfast is being served!"

The only time he was allowed to play with the big toys in the main kitchen was after judging had finished, when he was as happy as a clam at high tide preparing gastronomic delights for dinner. Roger also took it upon himself to be the CSWWC quizmaster

Opposite: The judges hard at work (Seated, from right): Essi Avellan MVM, Simon Stockton, and Tom Stevenson.

Photography courtesy of Riedel

IN VINO VERITAS

As chairman of CSWWC, I have no additional powers when it comes to judging. All three judges are equal in rank, and there is no (ludicrous) situation where a chair of judges has the casting vote. I am responsible, however, for how the competition is set up, and one of the most important decisions I have to make is the choice of glass.

Riedel Veritas Champagne Glass is easily my first choice for home and judging. The only glass that comes remotely close, as far as I am concerned, is also from Riedel—the Superleggero Champagne Glass—but that is handmade, hand-finished, significantly more expensive, and its stem is too long to be practical for competition use. At the table, though, Superleggero is peerless.

The **Veritas** bowl is as elegant as it gets, with a paper-thin rim and an exquisitely slender stem that looks thinner than a Zalto. (Actually, it is an optical illusion, because Zalto's is microscopically thinner for only a centimeter or so, from which it widens noticeably toward both the bowl and the stem, whereas Riedel's Veritas retains its slenderness for 95% of the length of its stem.) The Veritas stem-to-bowl ratio is perfect for swirling, nosing, and assessing, while the bowl-to-stem and stem-to-base joints are utterly seamless, thanks to a proprietary machine-pulling technology that is unique to Riedel. Other manufacturers will no doubt catch up one day, but as far as I am concerned, this machine-made glass is superior to virtually all handmade and hand-finished glasses.



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extraordinaire, providing an array of ever-more bizarre pub quizzes with charm and humor. He cooked up the tastiest takeaways for pub quiz nights, while his themed dinners in the dining room took us all back to those pre-pandemic days of carefree eating out.

The bubbly bubble

No one in the CSWWC team was allowed to arrive at our country retreat without having first passed the gold-standard RT-PCR coronavirus swab test, which the CSWWC had arranged in advance. We were then met on arrival by two doctors from C19 Testing. They gave all of us a rapid antigen test, and when the negative results came back (within just minutes), it was as if all our old freedoms had returned. Masks came off, and it was hugs, kisses, and handshakes all around—all those little things we had been missing for so long. The doctors returned four days later to

give us another rapid antigen test. We did not rely on a single test, not even the most accurate RT-PCR test. It was the combination of all three tests that gave us the reassurance we sought, and I would like to thank C19 Testing for their expertise in designing this bespoke regimen for CSWWC's specific needs.

But it was not just testing that created an effective bubble, because maintaining the integrity of a bubble is just as important. If you are serious about maintaining a Covid-proof bubble, you cannot have any of its members going to a different work bubble, as BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing* discovered, or using public transport and walking through central London, as the EU–UK Brexit teams found out. If you relax the vigil for one moment in a pandemic situation, the coronavirus will find its way in, as the Chilean army discovered at its Bernardo O'Higgins research station in Antarctica. But if a situation demands a bubble, it is not rocket science to maintain its integrity, so any failures can be put down to negligence in planning or application.

As already pointed out, it was far easier for the CSWWC to create and maintain a bubble than it was for competitions with hundreds of judges. From the moment our bubble was formed, no one was allowed to leave and no one else was permitted to enter. All deliveries were contactless and all items—whether wine entries, food, or any other sundry items—were decontaminated with 75 percent alcohol

wipes. Roger had his own roped-off delivery area and worked his toque off ensuring that adequate supplies of fresh food reached us safely for three meals a day. Meanwhile, Karl and Donald tirelessly slaved away, transferring thousands of wines and Riedel Veritas glasses from the SWS trucks, the drivers of which were under strict instructions not to leave their cabs.

It was at this point that I realized how far down the pecking order we judges actually were, because if any of us had tested positive on that first day, we always had a Plan B, C, and D for judging and could have coped, whereas if Roger, Karl, or Donald had tested positive, the whole competition would have collapsed before it started.

Behind the scenes

The judging was already on Plan B, because Essi Avellan MW and I had to cope without George (György Márkus), our Hungarian judge. Everyone loves George; he is the life and soul of the judging. But a Covid outbreak at his son's school meant that his entire family had to isolate. Stepping up for one year under Plan B was Simon Stockton, who has been with the CSWWC for five years. The incomparable tasting experience he has gained at the competition and personal mentoring he received from the late Tony Jordan, Essi, George, and me had certainly paid off, if the accuracy of his judging in 2020 was anything to go by.

Over the course of tasting 1,073 wines, the average score from Essi and me was 16.3 out of 20, while from Simon it was 16.4. Essi and I always score closely, but over such a large number of wines, an average of exactly 16.3 for each of us was spookily close even by our standards. We would have been happy with 16.3 and 16.5, so we were absolutely amazed and delighted that Simon averaged 16.4.

All three judges had the widest possible spread of scores, from a minimum of 11 to a maximum of 20. This is a bit of a given at the CSWWC because we follow the wisdom of James Halliday, who has always maintained that the wider the spread of scores, the better the judging. Halliday has always believed that judges should nail their colors to the mast, but they must also be prepared to defend their scores in

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a technical and objective sense. In Halliday's world, if a trainee judge does find himself wildly out of line with the rest of the panel, his explanation will be listened to intently, and it is what the trainee learns from the discussions with other more experienced judges that will hone his or her skill.

Another reason why a judge should have a wide spread of scores is because there is no wine competition at which all the wines submitted cluster around a middle-of-the-road score. Yet there are a lot of wine judges who play it safe, sitting on the fence with middling scores, which they can nudge up or down, so they are never caught out on a limb.

How do we score at the CSWWC, and why?

All medals must be agreed by all three judges.

- Gold: 18.5–20 points
- Silver: 17–18 points
- Bronze (theoretical): 15.5–16.5 points
- No award: 12.5–14 points
- Possibly faulty: 12 points
- Definitely faulty: 11 (and the judge must name the fault).

This is a 20-point system, and the top three medal categories (gold, silver, and bronze) are pretty much standard. Some wine competitions have adopted the 100-point scale, but that is merely a matter of calculation, to which any professional taster should be able to adapt quite easily.

In recent years, we have seen the introduction of an upper level of so-called double gold or platinum medals at various competitions, but skimming off the top layer of gold-medal wines devalues all the other gold medals.

Any awards beyond gold should reflect a specific purpose, such as Best in Class or a trophy. There can only be one Best in Class, one trophy winner. They are not a category of medal and do not affect the stature of gold.

Best in Class is the last truly objective verdict in any competition. All wines are judged blind, of course, but up to Best in Class they are judged blind exclusively against other wines of the same provenance and style. Take one step beyond Best in Class, and the judging loses its strict adherence to provenance and style.

A regional trophy still retains provenance, but it is a choice between different styles, whereas a national trophy is a choice between different regions and different styles. World Champion trophies strictly adhere to one style, but the choice is between wines from different origins. Think about this for just a moment, and it is clear that decisions made for these trophies can never be fully objective. How can you judge a Non-Vintage blend, a Vintage blend, a blanc de blancs, a blanc de noirs, and a rosé and say what is best, even if they all come from the same provenance? It would be like judging apples against pears. And sometimes it's like judging apples and asparagus. How do we resolve this? We look for the best balance of purity, finesse, and complexity, but we have to admit that our ultimate choice is more personal than objective.

No award, possibly faulty, and definitely faulty

Allowing a score of between 12.5 and 14 points enables the judges to indicate how bad a technically correct wine can be. We use, however, a single, fixed score to distinguish between no-award wines and wines that are possibly (12 points) or definitely (11 points) faulty. To receive the lowest possible score of the competition and the dubious honor of being labeled definitely faulty, the judge making that call has to name the fault in question.

It should be noted that most scores of 12 and 11 points are extremely ephemeral. Very few survive the day or even the duration of a single flight. This is because any judge believing a wine could be faulty or not showing at its best will immediately call for a

second bottle—if, that is, it has not already been requested by another judge. The original tasting note will then be prefaced “1st bottle,” and a “2nd bottle” note will be recorded as soon as the replacement wine has been poured. If it was just the first bottle that was off and not the wine per se, the scores of 12 or 11 will be instantly discarded and the wine from an untainted bottle reassessed. Even if the second bottle is just as bad, a third bottle will be opened up by Orsi Szentkiralyi, our tasting quality control director. She opens a second bottle of every wine that has not been awarded a gold or silver medal and compares it to the bottle or bottles the judges have tasted when they evaluated the wine. If she finds any sign of bottle variation, that wine is seamlessly fed back into the judging schedule. We find a significant number of faulty wines, but most are bottle variation. Very few are intrinsically faulty, and that is why the lowest possible scores of 11 and 12 are so ephemeral.

CSWWC 2020

This was always going to be a memorable year for obvious reasons, yet despite the global pandemic, we attracted a record-breaking number of entries. For the first five years of the CSWWC's existence, entries cruised along at approximately 650 per year. This was fine by me, since we deliberately encouraged producers to focus their entries, thus although we expanded each year in terms of the number of producers entering, the number of wines submitted stood still, as near as dammit. In 2019, entries increased by more than 30 percent to 850, but in 2020—the year the world stopped—entries shot up to 1,073, including no fewer than 180 in magnum.

The 2020 results

With a total of 185 golds and 212 silvers, this was the most successful CSWWC to date, reflecting a huge increase in entries and a continuing rise in baseline quality. This was the first year since the championships began that Italy won more medals than France, with 71 golds and 92 silvers, although Champagne once again romped home as the most successful region, with 61 golds and 49 silvers.



NATIONAL CHAMPION TROPHIES

ARGENTINA

Best Argentine Sparkling Wine

Chandon Argentina 2014 Brut in Magnum

Mendoza, Argentina (150cl, 12.9%) 55% Chardonnay, 45% Pinot Noir (white, 6g RS)

The winner of Best Argentine Sparkling Wine for 2020 is the Best in Class Argentine Brut and Best in Class Argentine Magnum, and what a wonderfully complex display of complex gunpowder sulfides this gives off! Beautifully sweet fruit and toasted brioche on a rich and broad palate, lifted by the softness of its mousse.

AUSTRALIA

Best Australian Sparkling Wine

The shortlist:

BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN BRUT NON-VINTAGE BLEND: House of Arras NV Brut Elite Cuvée 1501
BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN BRUT VINTAGE BLEND: Chandon Australia 2008 Late Disgorged Brut
BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN BLANC DE BLANCS: House of Arras 2009 Vintage Blanc de Blancs
BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN BRUT NATURE & BEST AUSTRALIAN MAGNUM: House of Arras 2004 EJ Carr Late Disgorged Vintage

The winner:

House of Arras NV Brut Elite Cuvée 1501 Tasmania, Australia

(75cl, 13%), 49% Pinot Noir, 42% Chardonnay, 9% Pinot Meunier (5.2g RS)

Ed Carr's relatively modest yet seriously underrated Elite Cuvée steals the Australian crown once again. It is the measure of the man that he manages to blend natural mature notes into an essentially youthful base wine so seamlessly. Complex, toasty aromas melt effortlessly into pristine white-fruit Chardonnay aromas, while fresh, crisp, and crunchy Pinot fruit nestles gently on a soft and silky mousse. Long, linear, and lovely.

BULGARIA

Best Bulgarian Sparkling Wine

Midalidare Sparkling Wine NV Brut in Magnum

Thracian Lowland, Bulgaria (150cl, 12.1%) 100% Chardonnay (5g RS)

The winner of the Tony Jordan Rising Star Trophy in 2019, Midalidare returns this year with the Best in Class Bulgarian Blanc de Blancs Brut and Best in Class Bulgarian Magnum. Lovely, crisp, richness and purity of fruit, hanging on a classically lean and fine structure, with a little flurry of toasty, complex notes fluttering on the finish. This is nothing short of miraculous for a sparkling wine produced in mid-continental Europe.

GREAT BRITAIN

Best English Sparkling Wine

The shortlist:

BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH NV BLEND BRUT: Nyetimber NV Classic Cuvée in Jéroboam
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE BLEND BRUT & BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH SPARKLING WINE IN MAGNUM: Squerries 2014 Brut in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Hattingley Valley 2017 Rosé
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Ridgeview 2009 Blanc de Blancs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: Gusbourne 2016 Blanc de Noirs

The winner:

Nyetimber NV Classic Cuvée in Jéroboam

West Sussex & Hampshire, England, UK (300cl, 12%), 54% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir, 11% Meunier (white, 9.5g RS)

The superlatives could and should go on for this fabulous Jéroboam. It is quite extraordinary what happens when you put a “simple” Non-Vintage (2011 in this case) in a bottle of this size and allow it to evolve slowly under ideal storage conditions, and although it is at a beautiful plateau now, if you have a good enough cellar, it will remain in this drinkability zone for another 10 years or more. With such a luxurious toastiness on the nose, this is a gloriously fine and complex sparkling wine of the highest order, with a super-creamy mousse, great length, and classy, complex pastry notes. Great provenance and brilliant winemaking.

FRANCE

Best Non-Deluxe Champagne

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT & BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE MAGNUM: Palmer & Co NV Brut Réserve in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS DELUXE CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Louis Roederer 2012 Brut Rosé in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Palmer & Co NV Blanc de Blancs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT & BEST IN CLASS ORGANIC CHAMPAGNE: Domaine Alexandre Bonnet NV Blanc de Noirs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Laurent-Perrier 2008 Brut Millésime in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Devaux NV D Rosé in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: GH Mumm 2009 RSRV Blanc de Noirs in Magnum

BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Louis Roederer 2013 Blanc de Blancs Brut
BEST IN CLASS SINGLE VINEYARD CHAMPAGNE: Pommery 2004 Clos Pompadour Brut in Magnum

The winner:

Palmer & Co NV Brut Réserve in magnum
Champagne, France (150cl, 12%)
55% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir,
10% Meunier (white, 8g RS)

Tremendously fresh and invigorating, brimming with stylish, cool, bright-fruit aromas, showing exquisitely slow and fine evolution. Rich and toasty with pristine dried fruit complexity, and super-smart, velvety texture. When Palmer comes out on top against such truly great opposition, it is time that others should sit up and take notice.

Best Deluxe Champagne
The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS DELUXE CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS DELUXE CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT & BEST IN CLASS DELUXE IN CHAMPAGNE MAGNUM: Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS DELUXE CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Laurent-Perrier NV Grand Siècle Iteration No.24
BEST IN CLASS DELUXE CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Ruinart 2006 Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS DELUXE CHAMPAGNE LIBRARY BRUT: Rare Champagne 1998 Millésime in Magnum

The winner:

Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum
Champagne, France (150cl, 12.5%)
60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay (rosé, 9g RS)

To create such a vivacious wine that is so fresh, light, and delicate, yet intensely long, lingering, and tapering must fall somewhere between miraculous and impossible. The aromas are so enticing that you have to force yourself to pull the glass away from your nose and put the wine in your mouth, then the sheer silkiness of the mousse supporting such seductive and coolly elegant fruit is so ridiculously enjoyable that you don't want to let it go. If this does not get your heart racing, you haven't got a pulse.

Best Champagne
The shortlist

BEST NON-DELUXE CHAMPAGNE: Palmer & Co NV Brut Réserve in Magnum
BEST DELUXE CHAMPAGNE: Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum

The winner:

Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum

See Best Deluxe Champagne

Best French Sparkling Wine

The shortlist

BEST ALSACE SPARKLING WINE: Cave de Hunawihr NV Crémant Calixte 5 Rosé AOC Crémant d'Alsace
BEST CHAMPAGNE: Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum
BEST LOIRE SPARKLING WINE: Bouvet Ladubay NV Brut Saumur Brut AOC Saumur

The winner:

Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum

See Best Deluxe Champagne

HUNGARY
Best Hungarian Sparkling Wine

Kreinbacher 2016 Brut Classic in Magnum
Nagy-Somló Borvidék, Hungary (150cl, 12%)
71% Furmint, 29% Chardonnay (8.3g RS)

Kreinbacher is yet again the winner is the Best in Class Hungarian Brut Vintage and Best in Class Hungarian Magnum. We have noticed the green shoots of other boutique sparkling-wine producers emerging in Hungary, but none has yet demonstrated anything close to the quality of Kreinbacher, let alone its consistency. Nice bottled sulfides make for a refined toastiness with attractive, reductive nuances. Curbing the natural excesses of Furmint renders a light enough body, with pure, bright fruit and some yeast-complexed notes, a fine acid line, and a long, juicy finish.

INDIA
Best Indian Sparkling Wine

Chandon India NV Brut
Nashik Valley, Maharashtra, India (75cl, 12.5%)
100% Shiraz (rosé, 12g RS)

This is the second consecutive trophy for Chandon India, and the second consecutive failure by Chandon China, which initially showed greater success at the CSWWC. Hopefully Chandon China was not a flash in the pan, and will reemerge at a later date. Meanwhile, Chandon India has excelled with a very different variety this year. We have tasted its Shiraz rosé before, but not as good as this Best in Class Indian Non-Vintage Rosé, with fresh, easy-drinking clean fruit and spicy berry notes. Quite sweet on the palate, but fresh, energetic, and elegantly balanced. It will be interesting to see where they go with this.

ITALY
Best Asti

Cuvage NV Acquesi Asti
Asti DOCG, Piemonte, Italy (75cl, 7%)
100% Moscato (90g RS)

The Best Asti regional trophy yet again goes to Cuvage. The fluffy, silky-smooth mousse of Cuvage Acquesi Asti is irrefutable evidence that fermenting a sparkling wine in a tank does not adversely affect the size of the bubbles. It's just a myth. Fresh, fragrant, grapey, and floral aromas

persist from nose through fruit to finish in soft, creamy, super-pretty, and super-smart wine.

Best Franciacorta
The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Romantica NV Rosé
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Fratelli Berlucchi 2014 Freccianera Rosa in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Lantieri de Paratico 2015 Arcadia
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT & BEST FRANCIACORTA MAGNUM: Fratelli Berlucchi 2014 Freccianera Satèn in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA BRUT NATURE: Ca' del Bosco 2015 Vintage Collection Satèn in Magnum

The winner:

Fratelli Berlucchi 2014 Freccianera Satèn in Magnum
Franciacorta DOCG, Lombardy, Italy (150cl, 12.5%), 100% Chardonnay (white, 7.6g RS)

The lovely, refined, toast-complexed aroma and silky-soft, creamy mousse together add to the finesse of the fresh, supple, slowly evolving, creamy-citrus fruit, but it is the structure that is the killer quality factor here, providing intensity without too much weight. That and the beautiful acid line that connects everything to a lingering mousse and tapering finish.

Best Lambrusco

Cantina Zucchi 2019 Etichetta Bianca
Lambrusco di Sorbara DOP, Emilia-Romagna, Italy (75cl, 11%)
100% Lambrusco di Sorbara (red, 11g RS)

After last year's glut of nine gold medals for new-wave Lambrusco, the number of entries soared from 21 to 78, and we braced ourselves to be blown away by a shed-load of gold-medal Lambrusco—yet we found just two. At the beginning of the pandemic, Italy was particularly badly affected, and the mountain passes were jammed with freight trying to get through; maybe some of the wines were adversely affected as a result? Whatever the reason, the two golds this year were both stunners and happened to be pure Lambrusco di Sorbara, while in 2019 the golds were dominated by the darker Lambrusco Salamino grape. Many producers claim the lighter-colored Sorbara to be the best or, at least, the most elegant, and elegance is perhaps the most striking quality of Cantina Zucchi 2019 Etichetta Bianca. Despite its medium-cherry color, it has a much richer, red-fruit compote aroma than sight of the wine would at first suggest. It has lovely, fresh, and vibrant cherry fruit on the palate, supported by a soft mousse, good energy, and carry.

Best Prosecco
The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO DRY: Tenuta Amadio 2019 Dry Millesimato
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO BRUT: Bottega NV Bottega Gold Prosecco DOC

Nothing pleases CSWWC judges more than when a producer's entry-level wine (albeit in magnum) rises to the top. The Ferrari NV Brut is a great wine. Quality vineyards, smart winemaking, and great Trentodoc!

BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO EXTRA-DRY & BEST IN CLASS ORGANIC PROSECCO: Follador 2019 Extra Dry
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO BRUT: Andreola 2019 Dirupo Brut
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO EXTRA-DRY: Bellussi NV Extra Dry
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO EXTRA-DRY: Bortolin Angelo 2019 Extra Dry
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO VINTAGE BRUT: Nino Franco 2018 Nodi

The winner:

Follador 2019 Extra Dry Valdobbiadene
DOCG Prosecco Superiore, Veneto, Italy (75cl, 11.5%), 100% Glera (White, 15g RS)

As much as we love Primo Franco and his Nino Franco range of award-winning Prosecco wines, it is always exciting to see a different name claim the top award, even if it has taken seven years. This Follador 2019 Extra Dry Valdobbiadene is very fresh and fine, with a creamy mousse; crisp, sweet, elegant fruit; and a touch of spiced lemongrass. Long and succulent.

Best Sicilian Sparkling Wine

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS SICILIAN VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT & BEST IN CLASS SICILIAN MAGNUM: G Milazzo 2011 Federico II in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS SICILIAN BRUT NATURE: G Milazzo NV Milazzo Nature V2

The winner:

G Milazzo 2011 Federico II in Magnum
Campobello di Licata VSQ, Sicily, Italy (150cl, 12.5%), 100% Chardonnay (white, 6g RS)

This is impressive for its age from Sicily, one of the most beautiful islands in the Mediterranean, with vineyards that are capable of producing some excellent wines, but a far cry from being my first choice for sparkling-wine production. So, hand on heart, when I say *bene factum* for entering this lovely toasty-rich, tropical-fruity offering with a great, life-preserving acid line.

Best Trentodoc

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC NV BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT & BEST TRENTODOC MAGNUM: Ferrari NV Brut in Magnum

BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: Ferrari 2011 Perlé Nero Riserva in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Ferrari 2013 Perlé in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS ORGANIC TRENTODOC: Maso Martis 2014 Brut Riserva in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Maso Martis 2008 Madame Martis Brut Riserva in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Rotari 2013 AlpeRegis Rosé Magnum in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC BRUT NATURE: Ferrari 2006 Giulio Ferrari Riserva del Fondatore in Magnum

The winner:

Ferrari NV Brut in Magnum

Trentodoc DOC, Trentino, Italy (150cl, 12.5%) 100% Chardonnay (white, 6g RS)

Nothing pleases the CSWWC judges more than when a producer's entry-level wine (albeit in magnum) rises to the top, because it's like saying this is as bad as it gets. Anyone who knows anything about sparkling wine would have to admit that this is a great wine by any standards. It has real toasty, not gunpowdery, aromas, with rich yet lean, bright crunchy fruit, complex notes of coffee, a creamy mousse, and a great acid line. Lean, long, and lingering. Quality vineyards, smart winemaking, and great Trentodoc!

Best Italian Sparkling Wine

The shortlist

BEST ASTI: Cuvage NV Acquesi Asti
BEST FRANCIACORTA: Fratelli Berlucchi 2014 Freccianera Satèn in Magnum
BEST LAMBRUSCO: Cantina Zucchi 2019 Etichetta Bianca
BEST PROSECCO: Follador 2019 Extra Dry
BEST SICILIAN: G Milazzo 2011 Federico II in Magnum
BEST TRENTODOC: Ferrari NV Brut in Magnum

The winner:

Ferrari NV Brut in Magnum

See *Best Trentodoc*

NEW ZEALAND

Best New Zealand Sparkling Wine

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS NEW ZEALAND BRUT NON-VINTAGE: Hunters Wines NV MiruMiru
BEST IN CLASS NEW ZEALAND NON-VINTAGE V ROSÉ BRUT: No.1 Family Estate NV Rosé

The winner:

No.1 Family Estate NV Rosé

Marlborough, New Zealand (75cl, 12.5%) 100% Pinot Noir (rosé, 7.5g RS)

Champagne-born Daniel Le Brun has edged Hunter's off the New Zealand top spot with this very pale salmon-colored sparkling wine, with its delicate, peachy fruit, soft, cushiony mousse, silky texture, and long, juicy finish, all held together by a lovely acid line.

PORTUGAL

Best Portuguese Sparkling Wine

Provam NV Castas de Monção

Monção e Melgaço, Minho, Portugal (75cl, 13%) 70% Alvarinho, 30% Trajadura (white, 0.6g RS)

The first-ever winner of Best Portuguese Sparkling Wine is a fully sparkling Vinho Verde, which was a delightful surprise for all the judges. Overall, the impression is of lovely fresh fruit, with soft white fruits on the nose, creamier on the palate, and a nice intensity offset by some yeast-complexed notes on the finish.

SPAIN

Best Cava

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS CAVA VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Pere Ventura 2017 Tresor Reserva
BEST IN CLASS CAVA NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Mascaró NV Pure Brut Nature
BEST IN CLASS ORGANIC CAVA & BEST IN CLASS BRUT NATURE: Agustí Torello Mata 2015 Barrica Gran Reserva
BEST IN CLASS CAVA MAGNUM: Freixenet NV Cordon Negro in Magnum

The winner:

Mascaró NV Pure Brut Nature

Cava DO, Vilafranca del Penedès, Spain (75cl, 12%), 90% Parellada, 10% Macabeo (white, 1.5g RS)

The peppery spice on this top-flight Cava adds elegance to its smoky-complexed gunpowdery aroma, leading into fresh, fragrant, and glossy fruit on the palate, with creaminess and ripeness skillfully balanced by acidity providing length, as well as depth.

Best Corpinnat

Gramona 2015 Imperial

Corpinnat DO, Barcelona-Tarragona, Spain (75cl, 12%), 50% Xarel-lo, 30% Macabeo, 15% Chardonnay, 5% Parellada (white, 5.2g RS)

Reluctant to sample Spanish sparkling wine? Before you give up, try this little classic. Super-stylish, fine, yeast-complexed toasty aromas, with fresh and pure fruit on the palate. This beautiful wine should satisfy most fizz fanatics who have until now found it hard to get their heads around what Xarel-lo, Macabeo, and Parellada bring to the table. Well, with just 15% Chardonnay in support, this is what they can bring to the table.

Best Spanish Sparkling Wine

The shortlist:

BEST CAVA: Mascaró NV Pure Brut Nature
BEST CORPINNAT: Gramona 2015 Imperial

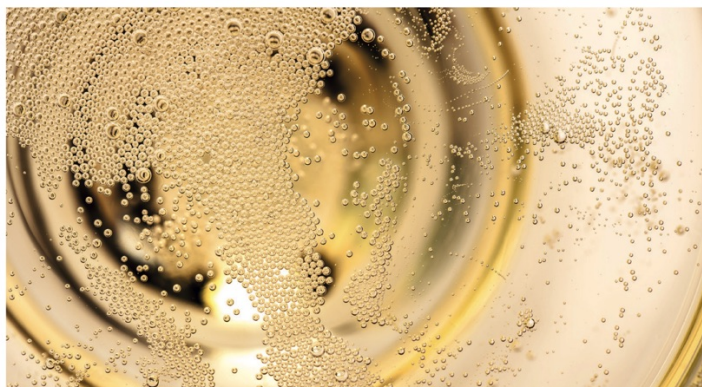
The winner:

Gramona 2015 Imperial

See *Best Corpinnat*

USA

Best US Sparkling Wine



The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS CALIFORNIA VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Caraccioli Cellars 2014 Brut Rosé
BEST IN CLASS CALIFORNIA NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Domaine Chandon California NV Rosé

The winner:

Caraccioli Cellars 2014 Brut Rosé

Santa Lucia Highlands, California, USA
(75cl, 12%), 60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir (rosé, 11.5g RS)

Very pale peach color, with rich, yet elegant fruit, and a high-acid palate, this wine is highlighted by toasty, floral-spiced oak (30% barrel-fermented), which leads to ginger-spice, apple-pastry fruit on a long and intense finish.

WORLD CHAMPION TROPHIES

World Champion Classic Brut Non-Vintage

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: House of Arras NV Brut Elite Cuvée 1501
BEST IN CLASS CAVA NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Mascaró NV Pure Brut Nature
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Nyetimber NV Classic Cuvée in Jeroboam
BEST IN CLASS LOIRE NON-VINTAGE NON-CLASSIC BLEND BRUT: Bouvet Ladubay NV Brut Saumur Brut
BEST IN CLASS NEW ZEALAND NON-VINTAGE BRUT: Hunters Wines NV MiruMiru
BEST IN CLASS NON-DELUXE CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Palmer & Co NV Brut Réserve in magnum
BEST IN CLASS PORTUGUESE NON-VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Provam NV Castas de Monção
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO BRUT: Bottega NV Bottega Gold Prosecco Doc

The winner:

Palmer & Co NV Brut Réserve in Magnum

See Best Non-Deluxe Champagne

World Champion Classic Brut Vintage

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS ARGENTINE BRUT: Chandon Argentina 2014 Brut in Magnum

BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN BRUT VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Chandon Australia 2008 Late Disgorged Brut
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE BRUT: Squerries 2014 Brut in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS NON-CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Laurent-Perrier 2008 Brut Millésime in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS HUNGARIAN VINTAGE BRUT: Kreinbacher 2016 Brut Classic Magnum
BEST IN CLASS PROSECCO VINTAGE BRUT: Nino Franco 2018 Nodi
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Lantieri de Paratico 2015 Arcadia
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Maso Martis 2008 Madame Martis Brut Riserva in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CAVA VINTAGE BLEND BRUT: Pere Ventura 2017 Tresor Reserva
BEST IN CLASS COPPINAT VINTAGE BRUT: Gramona 2015 Imperial

The winner:

Laurent-Perrier 2008 Brut Millésime in Magnum

Champagne, France (150cl, 12%), 50% Chardonnay, 50% Pinot Noir (white, 9.2g RS)

At a time when many 2008s are showing their bones and some are suffering from dangerously low SO₂ regimes, this particular 2008 in magnum is a beacon of what this great vintage could and should have been. Beautiful, slow, toasty evolution on the nose, with pristine pineapple fruit on the palate, and cream and vanilla on a long, lingering, and mesmerizing finish. Wow!

World Champion Classic Blanc de Blancs

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS AUSTRALIAN VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: House of Arras 2009 Vintage Blanc de Blanc
BEST IN CLASS BULGARIAN BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Midalidare Estate NV Brut Magnum
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Ridgeview 2009 Blanc de Blancs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Palmer & Co NV Blanc de Blancs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Louis Roederer

2013 Blanc de Blancs Brut
BEST IN CLASS SICILIAN VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: G Milazzo 2011 Federico II in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Fratelli Berlucchi 2014 Freccianera Satèn in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC NON-VINTAGE BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT: Ferrari NV Brut in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC BLANC DE BLANCS VINTAGE: Ferrari 2013 Perlé in Magnum

The winner:

Midalidare Estate NV Brut Magnum

See Best Bulgarian Sparkling Wine

World Champion Classic Blanc de Noirs

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: Domaine Alexandre Bonnet NV Blanc de Noirs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: GH Mumm 2009 RSRV Blanc de Noirs in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: Ferrari 2011 Perlé Nero Riserva in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT: Gusbourne 2016 Blanc de Noirs

The winner:

Domaine Alexandre Bonnet NV Blanc de Noirs in Magnum

Champagne, France (150cl, 12.5%)
100% Pinot Noir (white, 9.6g RS)

A blanc de noirs is one of the hardest styles to get right in Champagne, where it is prone to oxidation. But when it works well, it can work beautifully, like this supremely fresh, yet nicely mellowed, classically constructed Champagne, which is supported by a refreshing mousse of minuscule bubbles, and ends with very long, tapering finish. Lovely, stylish toast to the nose and really light and refined for blanc de noirs. Mouthwatering juiciness!

World Champion Classic Rosé

The shortlist

BEST IN CLASS ALSACE NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Cave de Hunawirh NV Crémant Calixte 5 Rosé
BEST IN CLASS ENGLISH VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Hattingley Valley 2017 Rosé
BEST IN CLASS CHAMPAGNE NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Devaux NV D Rosé in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS INDIAN NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Chandon India NV Brut Rosé
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Romantica NV Rosé
BEST IN CLASS FRANCIACORTA VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Fratelli Berlucchi 2014 Freccianera Rosa in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS TRENTODOC VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Rotari 2013 AlpeRegis Rosé in Magnum
BEST IN CLASS NEW ZEALAND NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: No.1 Family Estate NV Rosé
BEST IN CLASS CALIFORNIA NON-VINTAGE ROSÉ BRUT: Domaine Chandon California NV Rosé

BEST IN CLASS CALIFORNIA VINTAGE ROSÉ
BRUT: Caraccioli Cellars 2014 Brut Rosé

The winner:

Romantica NV Rosé

Franciacorta DOCG, Lombardy, Italy (75cl, 12.5%), 90% Pinot Noir, 10% Chardonnay (rosé, 6.5g RS)

I must confess this was a surprise for us, but impressive nonetheless. It is so fresh for a Pinot-dominant rosé, with a fine acid line, and a classy twist of vanilla on the finish. Pale peach in color, with attractive smoky-toasty aroma, fresh, bright, and vibrant, crunchy berries and pink grapefruit on the palate, and a juicy, succulent, lengthy finish.

World Champion Sparkling Red

Cantina Zucchi 2019 Etichetta Bianca

See *Best Lambrusco*

World Champion Sparkling Aromatic

Cuvage NV Acquesi Asti

See *Best Asti*

World Champion Library Vintage

Rare Champagne 1998 Millésime in Magnum

Champagne, France (150cl, 12%), 70% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir (white, 11g RS)

Very little ends up in the spittoon when tasting the best of the golden oldies, and Rare was definitely the best this year! Rare now has something approaching (if not exceeding) the reputation for a mature Champagne that Brut Réserve from its sister house Charles Heidsieck had at the height of the legendary Daniel Thibault's fame. Both wines achieved their reputation through consistency, and with Rare, we have Régis Camus to thank for that. When he stepped into Thibault's shoes, they were a perfect fit, as this gorgeous, toasty-rich masterpiece demonstrates. Its sweet, coffee, toast, and tropical-fruit aromas are perfectly mirrored from nose to palate, which is plush and sensuous, with an everlasting finish that is so soft and velvety. Hugely complex, with bright fruits, great concentration, and drive. What an amazing wine. *Chapeau, Régis!*

World Champion Tony Jordan Rising Star

The winner:

Provam

This company has put fully sparkling VINO VERDE on the map with Castas de Monção and turned the spotlight on Alvarinho and Trajadura as potential grapes to consider for serious-quality classic sparkling wine, enabling others to pick up the ball and experiment with these varieties elsewhere. Provam was formed in 1992 by 10 wine growers from the subregion of Monção e Melgaço and works with 200 small local growers, specializing in, primarily, Alvarinho (aka Albariño) and has been at the forefront of research of this grape variety. Winemaker Abel Codessa also

I knew the Midalidare NV Brut would be good, but I did not realize just how good it was until we stood it up against some of the world's greatest blanc de blancs in the World Champion Classic Blanc de Blancs taste-off

entered his more expensive Coto de Mamoelas sparkling wine. It came through the contest as a very good silver, but whether the Castas de Monção will always come out on top is impossible to say at this stage. We cannot wait to taste both cuvées in magnum.

See also *Best Portuguese Sparkling Wine*



CHAIRMAN'S TROPHY

The winner:

Midalidare Estate NV Brut Magnum

We awarded Midalidare the Tony Jordan Rising Star Trophy in 2019, so I knew this would be good, but frankly I did not realize just how good it was until we took it out of its provenance and stood it up against some of the world's greatest blanc de blancs in the World Champion Classic Blanc de Blancs taste-off, and it won! It also came third in the Supreme World Champion taste-off, proving that the World Champion trophy result was not an anomaly. There are several different cuvées in the Midalidare range, including one labeled as Blanc de Blancs, whereas this blanc de blancs is not. This is confusing, but there is a rational reason. First, Midalidare is moving from production that is only partly from its own vineyards, to 100% estate-grown; and second, there was no access to any Pinot Noir or Meunier until 2019, when its Dabovetz vineyard came online. So, most cuvées, with the exception of the one labeled Blanc de Blancs and possibly a single-vineyard sparkling wine, will be blends of some sort. Midalidare obviously needed to establish the cuvée names commercially, however, before the Pinot varieties became available. Presumably, it will gradually build up the Pinot Noir and Meunier

components as more vineyards come online, and this should allow them to ease away from 100% Chardonnay without any sudden change to the style. In the meantime, however, this wine (Lot number is L15-50) is definitely a blanc de blancs.



SPARKLING WINE PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

The winner:

Champagne Louis Roederer

This trophy is not a matter of choice or a vote, it is completely unbiased and based exclusively on the number of gold medals won. Historically, it has gone to either Champagne Louis Roederer or Ferrari-Trentodoc, alternating from one to the other each year. The winners have been: 2014 Roederer (4 golds), 2015 Ferrari (8 golds), 2016 Roederer (10 golds), 2017 Ferrari (11 golds), 2018 Roederer (11 golds), 2019 Ferrari (15 golds), and in 2020 Roederer (11 golds). Do these guys have a gentleman's agreement? Who will be the first to win this award in two consecutive years?

SUPREME WORLD CHAMPION

The contenders

BEST ARGENTINE SPARKLING WINE: Chandon Argentina 2014 Brut in Magnum
BEST AUSTRALIAN SPARKLING WINE: House of Arras NV Brut Elite Cuvée 1501
BEST BULGARIAN SPARKLING WINE: Midalidare Estate NV Brut in Magnum
BEST FRENCH SPARKLING: Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum
BEST HUNGARIAN SPARKLING WINE: Kreinbacher 2016 Brut Classic in Magnum
BEST INDIAN SPARKLING WINE: Chandon India NV Rosé Brut
BEST ITALIAN SPARKLING WINE: Ferrari NV Brut in Magnum
BEST NEW ZEALAND: No.1 Family Estate NV Rosé
BEST SPANISH SPARKLING WINE: Gramona 2015 Imperial
BEST ENGLISH SPARKLING: Nyetimber NV Classic Cuvee
BEST US SPARKLING: Caraccioli Cellars 2014 Brut Rosé

The winner:

Louis Roederer 2004 Cristal Rosé in Magnum

See *Best Deluxe Champagne*