

James The Sommelier Wine's Relations – Champagne

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

Champagne

As wine's noble cousin, Champagne deserves to be mentioned first among wine's relations. Of course, it came into being a lot later than wine but wowed the aristocratic world so profoundly that it quickly rose to a level of exclusive stardom, defining itself as the drink of celebration. Champagne was considered the height of luxury, served at high-end festivities including the anointment of French kings. This association with power and luxury spread like wild fire throughout European royalty, nobility and aristocracy; finally building the legend that is Champagne.

A rather epic result considering its elusive and confused creation. To have the most powerful people in the civilized world at your feet and crooning for your presence seems a far cry from being demonized by old monks. When Champagne was first discovered in France it was nick-named 'the devil's wine' due to its propensity to spit out corks and shower its drinkers in bubbly goodness. This disagreeable behaviour obviously did not sit well with those chaste monks.

Even the origin of one of the world's most famous drink is often mistaken. The drunk, loony monk Dom Perignon did not invent Champagne; he probably caused a stir when chancing upon it (by getting so drunk that even God could not help him) but he did not invent it. The true invention of Champagne was by French Benedictine Monks in the Abbey of Saint Hilaire near Carcassonne in 1531, almost 150 years before claims by Dom Perignon. Also in between that time an English physicist, Christopher Merret, was recorded as the first person to notice and document the addition of more sugar to induce a second fermentation to create carbon dioxide in sparkling wine. Then cue Dom Perignon.

But, we are talking about Champagne, not sparkling wine. Champagne was the first sparkling wine and therefore the queen bee, the original, the king. To his consolation, Dom Perignon Champagne can be considered one of the world's finest bottles with its presence influencing greats such as Doris Duke, Andy Warhol, and Sotheby's in Hong Kong by setting an international auction record and, still, royalty, as the drink served at Prince Charles and Lady Diana's wedding. It was while Madame Pompadour was drinking Dom Perignon that she exclaimed "Champagne is the only drink that makes women beautiful after drinking."

There are many styles with varying colours and prices. The curious blanc de noirs champagnes, made from the red grapes Pinot Noir and/or Pinot Meunier, are champagnes made solely with red grapes, giving them a apricot to salmon colour. Bollinger uses this method for their prestige cuvée Vieilles Vignes Françaises leading to its famous richness and full-bodied nature. On the flip side you also have the choice of blanc de blanc champagnes, made from pure Chardonnay grapes and Ruinart is one of the best examples.

Tips: Of course, you could go for the famous and expensive Dom, Moët & Chandon, Bollinger, Veuve Clicquot or opt for something a little less dear. Try That Little Wine Bar's Prosecco di Valdobbiadene doc Ca' De' Rocchi, a cheaper option but with a dry high-end taste.

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road,
George Town, Penang

Email info@thatlittlewinebar.com for details