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The world’s great sparkling wines: countries, styles and smarter ways to choose

A guide to why Champagne, cava, Prosecco, Sekt, Cap Classique and other benchmarks stand out for method, grapes, origin and style.

Tuesday, October 27, 2026



Sparkling wines from different origins offer a variety of styles; choosing one depends on personal taste, not just a country’s reputation. Educational illustration generated with AI.

Asking about the world’s best sparkling wines does not have to end in a podium. For anyone just getting started, it is more useful to understand what each country offers, which methods it uses and which styles may suit your taste best.

The best sparkling wines: a map of benchmarks, not a championship

When people ask which countries make the best sparkling wines in the world, the most honest answer is not a fixed list of winners. Some places carry enormous prestige, some styles are instantly recognisable and excellent bottles come from many origins, but fame, quality and personal preference are not the same thing. What really helps is knowing the main reference points and understanding what sets each one apart.

It also helps to separate a country’s name from the experience in the glass. Origin can be a strong clue about tradition, grapes or method, but it does not mean every bottle will taste the same or suit every drinker. That is why it is worth exploring styles and regions rather than looking for a single flag to back.

The differences worth understanding before you start exploring

The first big clue is how the bubbles are made. In the traditional method, the second fermentation happens in the bottle. After that, the wine may spend time in contact with the lees, the spent yeast left after fermentation. That contact often brings more texture and aromas that recall bakery notes or fresh dough. Champagne, cava, Franciacorta and Cap Classique all belong to this family, even though each keeps its own identity.

Another important route is fermentation in tank, also called the Charmat or Martinotti method. Here, the second fermentation takes place in a sealed pressure-resistant tank rather than in each bottle. This is often linked to styles that focus more on fruit and on the grape’s own aromas. It is not an inferior version of the traditional method: it is aiming for a different result. Other approaches exist too, and in some aromatic Italian sparkling wines the bubbles can come from a single controlled fermentation.

That is enough to stop a label or wine list from feeling confusing. Method, ageing and grape variety help you anticipate a wine’s profile, but they do not create an automatic hierarchy. A very fresh, fruit-driven sparkling wine can be just as satisfying as one with more ageing character, depending on what you want to drink.

Three terms that help you get your bearings

Traditional method

The second fermentation takes place in the bottle.

It is often associated with more texture and ageing notes.

Charmat or Martinotti method

The second fermentation takes place in a sealed pressure-resistant tank.

It usually highlights fruit and the grape’s own aromas more clearly.

Lees

These are the spent yeast left behind after fermentation.

Contact with the wine can add texture and bakery or dough-like aromas.

France and Spain: Champagne, crémants and cava with identities of their own

France is impossible to ignore because it is home to Champagne, a region whose name has become shorthand for prestigious sparkling wine for many consumers. Its production is based on a second fermentation in bottle, and its main grapes are chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier. That starting point helps explain why many Champagnes combine freshness, texture and complexity, although not every bottle expresses those qualities in the same way.

But France does not stop at Champagne. Crémants from Alsace, Burgundy or the Loire greatly widen the map of French sparkling wine and offer other balances of fruit, acidity and ageing within the broader world of the traditional method. They share a production logic, not an identical personality, so it makes more sense to treat them as related

families than as exact copies.

Spain enters the conversation with cava, also made by the traditional method but with a very clear identity of its own. Its classic combination of macabeo, xarel·lo and parellada helps explain that identity: macabeo often brings floral notes, xarel·lo provides structure and parellada is associated with finesse and freshness. These are useful pointers to style, not a promise that every cava will taste exactly like that.

The key point is simple: sharing a method with Champagne does not make cava an automatic equivalent. The grapes change, the landscapes change and the profiles change. Spanish sparkling wine is also not entirely defined by cava, just as French sparkling wine is not exhausted by Champagne.

Reference point	Main clue	What not to assume
Champagne	A prestigious French region, with chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier among its main grapes.	That every French sparkling wine is Champagne, or that all bottles taste the same.
Crémant	A French family that opens other routes, such as Alsace, Burgundy or the Loire, within the traditional method.	That it is an exact copy of Champagne or an identical experience.
Cava	A Spanish traditional-method sparkling wine classically linked to macabeo, xarel·lo and parellada.	That it is an automatic equivalent to Champagne, or that it sums up all Spanish sparkling wine.

Italy: the spread of Prosecco and a diversity that goes far beyond it

Italy offers one of the most varied journeys in sparkling wine, and Prosecco is one of its best-known reference points. It is linked to north-eastern Italy, the glera grape and the Martinotti or Charmat method. Its style often appeals to drinkers looking for fruit and

lifted grape aromas. According to the history published by its consortium, sparkling production expanded in the 19th century, and the development of refermentation in autoclave, a sealed pressure-resistant tank, was another step in that story. In the 2009 reorganisation, DOC Prosecco was created and the former prosecco DOCs became DOCG, categories within Italy’s appellation system. The consortium connects that reorganisation with its international reach, without suggesting that one technique or one decision alone explains its success.

That said, reducing Italy to Prosecco means missing an essential part of the map. Franciacorta and Trento show the Italian face of the traditional method, with wines that appeal to anyone looking for more ageing character and a different style of mousse. They do not have to be better than Prosecco: they answer different preferences.

At the same time, Asti and Moscato d’Asti are a reminder that Italian sparkling wine can also be highly aromatic and built around a single controlled fermentation. For drinkers who enjoy moscato aromas and are not looking for the same bubble intensity or the same sweetness level in every bottle, they are a very useful way into another idea of sparkling wine. Italy shows better than most that method and quality are not automatic synonyms.

Germany and Austria: two traditions under the name Sekt

Sekt is an important word, but it does not tell you everything about how a wine will taste. In Germany, it can refer to sparkling wines made by the traditional method, the transfer method or tank fermentation. In the transfer method, the second fermentation happens in bottle and the wine is then moved to a tank for filtration before being bottled again. So it is not wise to read the word as if it revealed one single technique or one fixed level of quality. One of the most interesting paths within German Sekt is riesling, which offers a different expression from sparkling wines based mainly on chardonnay and pinot noir.

Austria also uses the term Sekt, but it has its own history, dating back to the 19th century and combining wines made in tank and in bottle. Here, grüner veltliner helps signal a different identity, and some specialist sources also show the presence of other grapes depending on the wines being examined. The useful lesson for the reader is that

Germany and Austria are not one single flavour block: it pays to check the country, the grape and the exact method.

Portugal: discovering Bairrada and Távora-Varosa

Portugal becomes much more interesting once the word espumante stops sounding generic and starts pointing to specific regions. Bairrada is one of the clearest references, with a tradition of método clássico, also called the traditional method, and with grapes such as baga, arinto and cercial. That combination helps show that Portuguese sparkling wine does not need to rely only on international varieties to have a personality of its own.

Távora-Varosa adds another useful clue: high-altitude vineyards and a mix of Portuguese varieties with chardonnay and pinot noir. For consumers, that means Portugal can offer both a strongly local identity and styles that feel more familiar if you already know other sparkling regions around the world. Neither area sums up all Portuguese espumante on its own, but both are excellent places to start exploring it with some context.

United States: two angles from California and Oregon

In the United States, the West Coast offers a particularly useful introduction. California is an obvious reference point, with chardonnay and pinot noir among the common grapes in its sparkling wines. That base connects it to some classic models in the wine world, although the final result always depends on the producer and the style being pursued.

Oregon broadens the picture because it combines traditional-method sparkling wines with other expressions, including some semi-sparkling styles or wines with a degree of sweetness. That diversity is a reminder that a large country does not have one single national profile, and that not even one region can be reduced to a single word. For the reader, the best clue is to look at the style of the specific wine rather than expect some uniform American taste.

China: one project in Ningxia helps place it on the map

China deserves a stop, but a precise one. One documented case is Chandon China in Ningxia, near the Helan Mountains. Available sources place the project’s trial harvest in 2012 and its full opening in 2013, with traditional-method sparkling wines made from chardonnay and pinot noir. That is enough to show that the country is already part of the sparkling wine map through specific projects with recognisable technical foundations.

It is also important to underline the limit of that information. The sources used here are corporate, which makes them useful for describing location, grapes, dates and method, but not for turning this example into an independent quality assessment or a portrait of all Chinese sparkling wine. Rather than proclaiming a new powerhouse, it is more sensible to see it as a sign of presence and diversity in the global landscape.

China on this map: a concrete sign, not a complete portrait

The case developed here is Chandon China in Ningxia, with chardonnay, pinot noir and the traditional method.

It helps show presence and diversity, not judge the quality of all Chinese sparkling wines.

South Africa: what identifies Cap Classique

South Africa brings a very recognisable identity with Cap Classique. The name is associated with sparkling wines made with a second fermentation in bottle, which places them within the broad family of the traditional method. For the consumer, that already offers a useful clue about the kind of production that may sit behind the name.

The key is not to turn Cap Classique into a label for every South African sparkling wine, or into an automatic promise of taste. It is one specific tradition within the country, not the whole country. Its interest lies in showing how a technique shared with other origins can take on a personality of its own in a different setting.

England: good reasons to explore it, without predicting its future

England has earned a place in any serious conversation about sparkling wine for concrete reasons, not simply because of expectation. There are documented wines from Kent, Sussex and Hampshire, often using chardonnay, pinot noir and meunier, and the traditional method plays a central role in that international image. One of the features most often highlighted in these wines is their acidity, which can be especially appealing to drinkers looking for tension and freshness.

That does not mean claiming England will dominate the future of sparkling wine, or using its figures as if they described the whole of the United Kingdom. The sensible view is to treat it as an origin worth attention for what it already offers in bottle and for an identity that may be especially attractive to certain palates. The origins, grapes and acidity described here are good reasons to explore its international potential among drinkers who value freshness, but they do not allow anyone to predict commercial success or claim it has more future than other countries. The traditional method is not the only technique found there either.

Australia: another route worth following

Australia rounds out this tour well because it adds geographical distance without simply repeating the same story. WSET points to Tasmania and Mornington Peninsula as important origins for traditional-method sparkling wine. For anyone who wants to keep exploring after France, Spain or England, they are names worth remembering.

As elsewhere, the best approach is not to turn two notable regions into a total definition of the country. Australia appears here as an invitation to widen the map, not as one single style or as a rival that has to be ranked against everyone else.

Which sparkling wine to explore based on your taste

If you are drawn to strongly fruity wines and clear grape aromas, it often makes sense to start with styles linked to tank production, such as many Proseccos, or with aromatic Italian moscato-based sparkling wines. If you prefer more texture and ageing notes, look towards traditional-method wines such as Champagne, cava, Franciacorta, Trento,

Cap Classique or many English sparkling wines. If acidity matters a great deal to you, some English sparkling wines can be especially interesting.

One last useful rule is to check three simple points when the bottle provides them: the production method, the grapes and the general style, including sweetness. To guide yourself, decide whether you want a dry wine, with little sweetness, or one with noticeable sweetness, and check that detail in the information for the specific bottle. Those clues help far more than a country’s prestige on its own. A great sparkling wine is not just the most famous one, but the one that matches what you genuinely enjoy drinking.

Before choosing a bottle

- Check the production method if it appears on the label or wine information.
- See which grapes it uses: they can help you anticipate fruit, freshness or ageing character.
- Decide whether you want a dry wine or one with noticeable sweetness.
- Treat the country as a useful clue, not as a guarantee that the wine will suit your taste.