

# BUBBLY & FUNCTIONAL

‘Popped’ mainly at festive occasions, **Lim Hwee Peng** discovers the many functional uses of Champagne.



“**C**hampagne is the only wine that leaves a woman beautiful after drinking it” proclaimed the Marquise de Pompadour, King Louis XV's favourite mistress. Besides historical linkage, such a classic bubbly was also a regular feature in James Bond movies; so much so that the irrepressible British spy admitted that it was a fad of his in *Casino Royale*.

Champagne, exclusive as its name suggests, is indeed unique in many ways. Although its tradition can be traced back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the much touted and unique winemaking technique, *methode champenoise*, is still in vogue today. As a matter of fact, it remains the main distinctive feature as compared to other sparkling produce from beyond the Champagne region.

It appears that Champagne has indeed become a successful brand which is equal to none. Yet, I would say that Champagne is a victim of its own success; they are so popular especially during festive periods that their existence for other gastronomic purposes and social events have been overlooked.

I will, for once, spare readers on the familiar ‘blind-monk-seeing-stars’ story; instead, the finer details of Champagne, at times interesting, which may very well inspire provoking thoughts will be shared.

Champagne has been regularly featured prominently during celebrations, especially during feasting and revelry. It is closely associated with victory and its role is most pronounced with the pulsating **Grand Prix** race. More often than not, a larger bottle format of Champagne will be brought up for the victory round, where the victors sporadically, or wastefully as some may perceive, spray Champagne aimlessly but joyously as they revel in their victorious moments.

Champagne and sparkling wines may be effectively promoted through strategic marketing activities propelling the bubbly to be perceived as a desirable premium product. Yet unexpectedly, sometimes the success of such efforts may overshadow the product itself.



## Champagne and Seafood

### Lobster

This apparently armour-plated sea creature with sharpened spine and raised antenna is fortunately tamed on the serving plate. The lobster is soft, delicate and creamy on the palate, requiring a Champagne which is refined and rich in flavours, as the sweet and sour notes, hints of vanilla and sweet spice scents, will provide an additional dimension to the lobster dish.

### Mussel

This shellfish with a taste of salt and seaweed calls for clean, fresh and full flavours of a full-bodied Champagne. Enjoying a bowl full of mussels with a bottle of bubbly is one of connoisseurs'

ultimate delights.

### Scallop

Nicknamed as the queen of the shellfish, scallop can be presented imposingly in its pearly shell. The milky white heart of scallop with a tinge of scarlet, promises delights to both seafood and Champagne lovers. The apparent nutty and sweet note flavours of this seafood, with a delicate yet firm texture requires an equally regal wine to accompany it; without doubt, that role falls on a bottle of Vintage Champagne. The contrast of scallop's sweetness and the aroma of honey and brioche in a Vintage sparkle are heavenly and sensual.

### Red Mullet

A prized catch that some gourmet treasure highly; this little rockfish has gamey flavours requiring a bottle of Vintage Rose Champagne to compete it with style. The power and magnitude of the rosy bubbly, with delicious berry flavours and violet aroma celebrate the almost perfect unison of food and wine.

## Is Vintage Champagne Better?

Many people have the perception that the quality of non-vintage Champagne is inferior and the price factor is one factor. However, there is little truth in this perception.

Both vintage and non-vintage Champagnes are made for different purposes utilising different methodologies. In essence, vintage Champagnes, as the name suggests, are so-named during the years when the harvest (vintage) are of a significant quality while non-vintage Champagnes are made annually (and are therefore more readily available).

In the production of non-vintage champagne, the champagne houses use Champagne stocks from various years to blend and create a 'house'-styled Champagne. Hence, Champagne lovers will agree that the quality and styles of premium vintage Champagnes differ from year to year, as compared to the NV (non-vintage) ones.

Non-vintage bubbly, on the other hand, have consistency, and are more interesting since the various producers create unique tastes and flavours which distinguishes them from others. For example, Bollinger NV is beefy and richer in style, while Roederer NV is fine and elegant in its structure. Therefore, do not discount non-vintage champagnes as they are equally succulent and suitable for celebrative or other memorable occasions, it is only a matter of preference and the depth of one's pocket.

The following is a list of my favourite NV Champagnes for your enjoyment:

### Joseph Perrier Cuvee Royale Brut NV

Bright pale yellow straw. Moderately full-bodied champagne. Fresh acidity on the nose and palate. Elegant touch on its structure with nutty and spicy aromas. Wonderful champagne with a rich mouth feel.

### Duval Leroy Paris NV

Bright straw yellow. Medium-bodied Champagne with bread and citrus aromas. Persistent citrus flavours on the palate. Elegant bubbly feel. Still very youthful.

### Nicolas Feuillatte NV

Brilliant yellow straw. Freshness is apparent but it is still rather youthful. Mature aromas with rich and round flavours on the palate. Creamy texture exhibiting apple flavours. Finishing with a touch of spice. Drink well now.

### Deutz Brut Classic NV

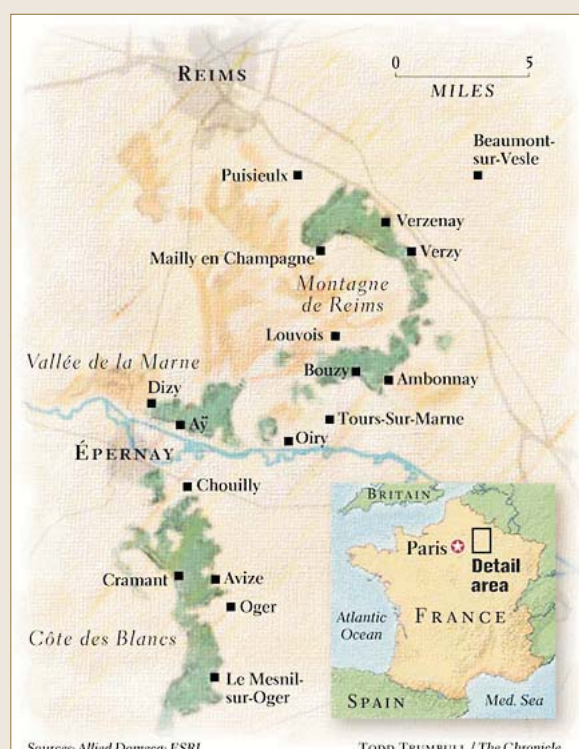
Full-bodied, sophisticated and nicely matured, this Champagne is quite complex and distinctive in character. The rich texture and expanding mousse make it luxurious and the lingering finish makes it memorable.

### Perrier Jouet Grand Brut NV

Fresh fizz and superbly balanced palate with light apple fruit and citrus notes which linger on an elegant finish.

### Piper Heidsieck Cuvee RARE NV

Piper Heidsieck Cuvee Rare Brut is a multi-vintage blend using up to 70% of Chardonnay grapes with the balance being Pinot Noir. A high percentage of reserve wines are used in this blend. The wine is aged for between four and five years before release, thus allowing the full richness and flavour of the wine to develop in the bottle. This is a champagne which shows the elegance of the Chardonnay backed by the fuller and more powerful Pinot Noir. Very long in the mouth with a persistent, fine mousse.





A case in point is the enormously successful marketing of Freixenet, Spain's signature sparkling wine (also known as CAVA). It is exported to over 150 countries worldwide and enjoys a highly recognisable status in the wine world. Freixenet Cava has a signature year-end advertisement that the Spanish look forward to annually. The wine conglomerate selects a celebrity or celebrities of interest for its targeted markets and features them in a glamorous manner.

The 'christened' celebrities include major players such as Liza Minelli in 1977, Gene Kelly in 1981, Victoria Principal (1987), Paul Newman (1989), Kim Basinger (1993), Meg Ryan (1997) and Penelope Cruz (2001). A visit to the Freixenet bodegas in Spain always begins with a brief showing of amalgamated glamour footages. Interestingly, such footages are so impressive that visitors have gone away with images of the coverage but little of the Cava.

Lovers of this classic bubbly may not have noticed that Champagne is a mandatory tool in unique ceremonial rituals; for instance, it is common to witness the launch of a ship or yacht's inaugural sail whereby the commissioning ceremony includes a Champagne bottle being smashed across the hull of the vessel. This is presumably for the much needed blessing of safe passage while at the mercy of the sea and other vagaries of nature.

The infectious bubbly is also on a regular on the fashion circuit. Moët & Chandon is one such Champagne closely associated with the colourful fashion scene. The current trend is garments or themes that are pink or in rosy shades. Naturally, Rose Champagne has become the rage during fashion weeks at major fashion capitals.

Such enthusiasm linking Champagne and stylishly-designed clothing is further fanned by the endorsement of renowned fashion gurus for this bubbly. Moët & Chandon, had for the first time, produced miniature Rose champagne – that is, a mini Moët Rose, for such special occasions. The commitment by the Moët House of Champagne for such events is based on the special affinity it enjoys with innovation, creativity and the originality with those in the fashion scene. The renowned French champagne house has also created a fashion award in recognition of the aspiring, young and talented designers in the field.

There are many wine lovers who champion Champagne because it is expressive and is viewed as an epitome of fun. However, it must be noted that Champagnes are also potentially more intoxicating than any other fermented wines. One of the main reasons is the existence of its infinite bubbles. It literally speeds up the intoxication process by allowing alcohol access into one's blood stream at high speeds, thus explaining the frequent occurrences of Champagne drinkers getting overly jolly quickly.

Despite the perceived limited leisure scope of Champagnes, the pleasures and entertainment factor in this majestic bubbly must be the chief elements that capture one's imagination and interest. There are evidently more purposes and reasons why Champagne should be drunk. Champagne is not only a celebratory drink;

it should also be a beacon light that brightens your wine journey.

Cheers!





## Count Bubbles

One criteria used in appraising and benchmarking Champagne would be the continuity and size of the bubbles. Generally, the finer the bubble is, the better the quality of the bubbly. But have you ever wondered how many bubbles are there in a glass of champagne? The blokes at Champagne Wine Information Bureau have provided an estimate using some scientific formula to derive the following data:

Using the relationship between the atmospheric pressure and the serving temperature to determine the carbon dioxide contained within a standard (750ml) Champagne bottle, it was determined that 5.5 times of Co<sub>2</sub> is held within the bottle and this is equivalent to approximately 4,125ml of dissolved gas.

Assuming the average diameter of each bubble is 0.5mm, the average volume of bubbles would be 69 million per ml. The bureau also postulated that at least 750ml of Co<sub>2</sub> is dormant which do not appear as bubbles, hence, only 3,375ml of bubbles would appear. With that information and through the division of the available volume of gas by the volume of the average bubble, it was estimated that there are 49 million bubbles per standard bottle of Champagne.

You may be in awe of the mind-boggling process to derive such a solution, but seriously, a glass of Champagne is suffice to quell the possible headache.



## Champagne Packaging

Did you know that this amazing bubbly is officially produced and packed into ten different sizes of bottles? Yes, and it is more common to see half bottles, standard bottles and magnums for most Champagne at the retail level or for dining and celebrative purposes. The other larger size bottles are less common.

BOTTLE	SIZE
Half Bottle	375 ml
Bottle (Standard)	750 ml
Magnum (2 bottles)	1.5 litres
Jeroboam (4 bottles)	3 litres
Rehoboam (6 bottles)	4.5 litres
Methuselah (8 bottles)	6 litres
Salmanazar (12 bottles)	9 litres
Balthazar (16 bottles)	12 litres
Nebuchadnezzar (20 bottles)	15 litres

