

A Champagne and Sparkling Wine Primer and Terms



Wine Wanderings

December 2021

Champagne Sweetness Terms

Brut Natural or Brut Zéro - very dry 0-3 gm./liter of sugar

Extra Brut - dry - less than 6 grams/liter

Brut - dry - less than 12 grams/liter (German - Herb)

Extra Dry, Extra Sec, Extra Seco - a bit sweeter - 12-20 grams/liter (German - Extra Trochen)

Dry, Sec, Seco - 17-35 grams/liter

Demi-Sec, Semi Seco - very sweet - 33-50 grams/liter

Doux, Sweet, Dulce - lusciously sweet - 50+ grams/liter

Champagne Bottle Sizes

Split - 187 ml.

Half-bottle - 375 ml.

Bottle - 750 ml.

Magnum - 1.5 Liters (2 Bottles)

Jeroboam - 3.0 L (4 Bottles)

Methuselah - 8 Bottles

Salmanazar - 12 Bottles

Balthazar - 16 Bottles

Nebuchadnezzar - 20 Bottles

Vintages, Styles, Producers

Vintage – a single harvest year, 100 % but only 80% of harvest can be sold that way, usually Brut. Can age for a decade or more

Tête de Cuvée, or Prestige Cuvée – the luxury top-of-the-line for a Champagne house, typically vintage dated, but not required. Only released in superior vintages. May have barrel fermentation or riddling by hand and cork-finishing in 2nd fermentation. They may be B de B or B de N or Rosé.

NV – non vintage – usually the signature or house style of a Champagne house, ensures consistency. Is ¾ of market

Blanc de Blancs- 100% made from all white grapes: (white from white) Chardonnay grapes but not all have to come from Côtes de Blancs. Intense bouquet with maturity, richness, steely in youth

Blanc de Noirs – 100% made from all red grapes (white from black) Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes- not as elegant and B de B.

Single Vineyard Champagne: may or may not be prestige cuvée. Not required to carry vintage date, but most do.

Special Club Prestige Cuvée – 1971 a dozen grower-producers banded together Club Trésor 24 RM producers. – the pinnacle of their style with identical packaging. Including Marc Hébrart, Paul Bara

Rosé Champagne – NV, Prestige, Vintage – saignée less common than blending. Only AOP in France that allows a rosé to be produced by blending red and white wine. Rosé prestige cuvée is usually a house's most expensive.

RD – Recently Disgorged – Bollinger. Extended lees aging.

Types of Champagne producers

RM (a “Grower Champagne” meaning Récoltant-Manipulant) – a grower owns his own vineyards and makes his own Champagne. 95% of fruit must be original from them.

NM – (meaning Négociant-Manipulant) A House appears on the labels of large Champagne houses that source the majority of their grapes from growers. These are the Houses. Who can buy grapes, must, wine, wine sur latte. They form multi-year contracts with growers to ensure supply. Many have their own vineyards. Some own no vineyards

CM – (meaning Coopérative-Manipulant) is a co-operative of growers who blend their Champagne from their collective vineyards. Typically growers supply grapes to the coop (perhaps a coop by Village) or larger. The chief vintner in the Coop makes the wine and wine is labeled CM. If the wine is returned to the grower for his own label then it is an RC (Recoltant-Coopérateur). Famous coops: Nicolas Feuillatte, Jacquart, and perhaps finest Mailly.

RC – (meaning Récoltant-Coopérateur) is a wine sourced from a single grower but made for them entirely by a cooperative.

SR – (meaning Société de Récoltants) is a registered firm set up by two or more growers who share a winery they use to make wine under their own labels. There is significant involvement of the grower in the winemaking process.

ND (Négociant Distributeur) – A middleman company that buys finished wine (which they did not make) and sell under own label

MA (Marque d’Acheteur) – A buyer's own brand, often a supermarket chain or restaurant, that purchases Champagne and sells it under its own label. Could be made by a house or a coop.

Courtiers/brokers – 16 in Champagne – not as important as in Bordeaux