

Sparkling secrets

Looking for something delicious but affordable to crack open over the festive season? Susie Barrie MW introduces a world of top-quality bubbly, and picks her top 25 under £25



IN 2015 ONE particular style of sparkling wine hit the headlines more than any other: Prosecco. For the first time, UK supermarket shoppers spent more on Prosecco than on Champagne and there were worldwide, midsummer scare stories that stocks would dry up before the new wines went on sale in October. Even the *Daily Mail* got in on the act, citing a report that suggested Prosecco had overtaken Champagne as the most popular choice of sparkling wine at weddings.

Our love affair with Italy's favourite fizz is certainly not new: I remember writing about how fashionable Prosecco was becoming more than a decade ago. What is interesting to see, however, is the positive effect its continued popularity has had on other sparkling wine categories, forcing producers everywhere to up their game and diversify, and resulting in seriously interesting options at every price level.

Over time, Prosecco itself has broadened from the traditional light, floral and frothy, off-dry fizz we've all grown to know and love, to include artisanal, bottle-fermented dry examples, and everything in-between. As a rule of thumb, and whatever your budget, choose the superior DOCG wines and remember that wines labelled Brut will be drier than Extra Dry,

and that spumante wines will be fizzier than those labelled frizzante.

Looking beyond Prosecco for a taste closer to that of Champagne, the best options are to be found in the New World, England and Franciacorta (Italy). Almost always produced by the traditional method (that is, re-fermented in the bottle) and from the same grape varieties as Champagne, these wines are often exceptionally well made and offer great value for the amount of flavour and class they deliver.

In terms of taste, the New World wines tend to be a little fruitier than their Champagne counterparts, while the English wines are frequently marked out by their racy acidity.

Producers of cava, more than any other sparkling wine, have suffered as a result of Prosecco's popularity, particularly in the budget category. On the flip-side, wine lovers have reaped the benefit, and today Spain's most popular traditional-method fizz has ➤

'Beyond Prosecco, the best options are in the New World, England and Franciacorta'

Barrie's top 25 sparkling wines to try



Domaine Huet, Pétillant Brut, Vouvray, Loire, France 2009 18.5/20 (95/100)
£19.50-£20 **Armit, Exel, The Wine Society, WoodWinters**
Vivid, rich scents of honey-glazed apple lead the way in this deliciously characterful fizz. Although dry, it is broad and mouthfilling with Chenin's typically intense acidity providing balance and ageability.
Drink 2015-2017 **Alcohol** 13%



Wiston Estate, Rosé, England NV 18.25 (94)
£24.95-£27.50 **South Downs Cellars, Swig, Vin Cognito, Waitrose Cellar, Wine Pantry, Wiston Estate**
A supremely elegant rosé with a subtle flavour of summer berries. Notes of freshly baked bread and spice overlay a core of tangy acidity in this superb wine from an increasingly noteworthy estate.
Drink 2015-2017 **Aic** 12%

Fortnum & Mason, Cuvée Brut, Franciacorta, Lombardy, Italy NV 18 (93)
£22.60 **Fortnum & Mason**
Although the nose is a little restrained, in the mouth this wine comes into its own as it slowly reveals an intriguing mix of smoky minerality, vibrant acidity, bright fruit and elegant autolytic notes. Still young, it will reward keeping. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Aic** 12.5%

Roederer Estate, Quartet, Anderson Valley, California, USA NV 18.5 (95)
£19-£25 **Adnams, Davy & Co, Exel, Forth Wines, Harrods, Hedonism, Inverarity Morton, James Nicholson, Le Vignoble, The Drink Shop, The Wine Society, The Wright Wine Co**
With its classic brioche aromas and fine, fresh mousse, this consistently excellent performer is the closest I have tasted to the real deal. Beautifully harmonious, multi-layered and long, it's one for the Christmas toast. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Aic** 12%

Domaine Grand, Crémant Brut, Jura, France 2009 18 (93)
£18.95-£20 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Philglas & Swiggot**
This characterful fizz is made from 100% Chardonnay and shows developed honey, red apple and mushroom flavours. Rich and soft, but with a streak of fresh acidity, it lacks the harmony of fine Champagne but has lovely persistence.
Drink 2015-2016 **Aic** 12%

Theale Vineyard, Founder's Reserve Blanc de Blancs, England 2010 18 (93)
£24.99 **Laithwaites**
Produced from a tiny vineyard planted outside Laithwaites' head office in Berkshire almost 20 years ago, this excellent blanc de blancs is made by the team at Ridgeview. From its nutty, appley aromas to its mouthwatering acidity, it displays great finesse and style. **Drink** 2015-2017 **Aic** 12% ➤





Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Right: the success of Prosecco has spurred sparkling wine producers around the world to raise their game

Barrie's top 25 sparkling wines to try (continued)



Wiston Estate, Brut, England NV 18 (93)
 £24.95 **Butlers Wine Cellar, Corney & Barrow, Hennings, Swig, Taurus Wines, Vin Cognito, Wine Pantry, Wiston Estate**
 Another seriously classy fizz from winemaker Dermot Sugrue. Gentle cream and yeast aromas give way to a finely textured and persistent palate that shows flavours of crisp green apples and freshly baked bread. **Drink 2015-2017 Alc 12%**

Il Mosnel, Franciacorta Brut, Lombardy, Italy NV 17.75 (92)
 £23.50 **Vini Italiani**
 A very good Italian alternative to Champagne, this is dry and nutty with a fresh, rounded mousse and a very classic feel to it. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 12.5%**

Ridgeview, South Ridge Brut, England 2012 17.75 (92)
 £24.99 **Laithwaites**
 This golden, Chardonnay-dominant blend is rich, yeasty and unashamedly bold. It is beginning to show savoury development and will appeal to those who prefer a broad, toasty style of Champagne. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 12%**

Titiana, Pansa Blanca Brut Cava, Alella, Spain 2011 17.75 (92)
 £16.99 **Red Squirrel Wine**
 From the relatively unknown Alella DO just north of Barcelona, where Xarel-lo is known as Pansa Blanca, this highly

individual vintage cava is creamy and bold with plenty of savoury flavours, complemented by cava's classic herbal notes. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 12%**

Casa Belfi, Prosecco Sur Lie, Treviso, Veneto, Italy NV 17.5 (91)
 £12.99-£13.49 **Exel, Joseph Barnes, Les Caves de Pyrène, Solent Cellar, Wright's Independent Food**
 Biodynamic, bone-dry, refermented in the bottle and unfiltered, this is about as 'natural' as Prosecco gets. I was sceptical, but it's superb. Imagine floating on a cloud of soft ripe pears over a garden of jasmine. If you fancy something out of the ordinary this Christmas, look no further than this. **Drink 2015-2017 Alc 10.5%**



La Gioiosa, Prosecco Superiore Brut, Valdobbiadene, Veneto, Italy 2014 17.5 (91)
 £13.49 **Waitrose**
 From its attractive white flower and peach aromas to its fine mousse and delicate touch of balanced sweetness, this is classic Prosecco at its very best. Incredibly harmonious and a delight to drink. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 11%**

Bluebell Vineyards, Hindleap Blanc de Blancs, England 2010 17.25 (90+)
 £23.99 **Amathus, Ellis of Richmond, Waitrose Cellar**
 Deeply coloured with smoky, bready aromas. There is a lot of green apple

acidity here, as well as expressive notes of honey and yeast. It is the kind of dry, characterful fizz that suits food, ideally a rich wild mushroom risotto. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 11.5%**



Jansz, Rosé, Tasmania, Australia NV 17.25 (90+)
 £15-£19 **AC Gallie, Exel, Love Wine, Ocado, Oddbins, Solent Cellar**
 A very elegant rosé with the merest hint of pink. Delicate red apple and pear aromas give way to a finely textured mousse and a light, dry finish. It lacks a little depth of fruit, but it is lively and refreshing. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 12%**

Langlois-Château, L'Extra par Langlois Crémant Brut, Loire, France NV 17.25 (90+)
 £12.99 **Majestic**
 A beautifully expressive crémant that is highly engaging in its broad, fruity way. Chenin Blanc is blended with Chardonnay to give flavours of apples and herbs. Although unoaked, it has subtle, nutty overtones and shows impressive length at this level. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 12.50%**

Graham Beck, Chardonnay-Pinot Noir Brut, Western Cape, South Africa NV 17 (90)
 £12.95-£13.99 **Cape London, Exel, Waitrose**
 The Graham Beck wines are classic in style and a good value, reliable alternative to Champagne. Here we have bready aromas allied to some New

redoubled its efforts to offer everything from very decent party wines at under £10 to more individual and complex boutique bottlings with prices in the Champagne realm.

Although many of the more expensive Spanish sparklers are 'Brut Nature' in style, which is popular in Spain and with some critics, be aware that these wines are bone-dry. In my opinion, they don't always have the flavour profile to carry that status off in the way that, for example, well-made examples from Champagne do. What is great to see is the way cava's traditional grape varieties – Xarel-lo, for example – are being coaxied into

producing excellent wines through lower yields and sensitive winemaking.

Finally, don't ignore French regions beyond Champagne. The best crémants and regional sparkling wines that are made using the traditional method, from local grape varieties, can offer delicious, robust and unusual drinking at very fair prices.

What follows is a selection of my favourite sparkling wines currently available at £25 or less. Whether you have in mind a New Year's Eve party or a traditional Christmas lunch with friends, you'll find there is something here to suit every palate, budget and occasion. **D**

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World fruitiness, and although the complexity of good Champagne is lacking, it's a very well-made traditional-method wine. **Drink** 2015-2016 **Alc** 12%



Heretat El Padruell, Brut Cava, Penedès, Spain NV 17 (90)

£8 **Marks & Spencer**

It's rare to find good cava at this price, but this is elegant, expressive and full of typical green apple, lemon and herb notes. Other than being a bit drier than most everyday cavas, it's an absolute classic.

Drink 2015-2016 **Alc** 11.5%

Klein Constantia, MCC Brut, Constantia, Western Cape, South Africa 2011 17 (90)

£16-£17 **Cape London, Cape Wine & Food, Dulwich Vintners, SA Wines Online**

Deep gold in colour and full of buttery, brioche aromas. A wine that will appeal if you like a very rich and savoury, developed style of fizz. The finish is bittersweet with hints of apple rind.

Drink 2015-2016 **Alc** 12%

Perelada, Gran Claustro, Brut Nature Reserva Cava, Penedès, Spain 2011 17 (90)

£20.50 **Amps, Coe Vintners, Field & Fawcett, Selfridges, Telford Wines, The Oxford Wine Co, Whitebridge Wines**

The quality and complexity of this wine is impressive and certainly good enough to cope with its bone-dry, brut nature style. For my taste it would be even

better with a touch of residual sugar to support those deliciously smoky, creamy, autolytic, red apple and pear flavours. **Drink** 2015-2017 **Alc** 12%

Recaredo, Terrers, Brut Nature Gran Reserva Cava, Penedès, Spain 2008 17 (90)

£23.62-£24.99 **Bottle Apostle, Exel, Highbury Vintners, Les Caves de Pyrène, Toasted**

From a highly regarded family of biodynamic producers, this bone-dry cava displays a fine, gentle mousse and flavours of waxy, glazed apples, herbs and lemon. It displays appealing mineral development but perhaps lacks a little excitement for the money.

Drink 2015-2016 **Alc** 12%



Colet, Vatea Extra Brut Cava, Penedès, Spain 2012 16.75 (89)

£15 **Bottle Apostle, Indigo Wine, Roberson**

A crazy blend of Moscatel, Parellada and Gewürztraminer, this Spanish fizz is aromatic, exotic and lots of fun. There's smoky lemon and apple fruit along with some autolysis. One for Asian food. **Drink** 2015-2016 **Alc** 12%

Le Colture, Pianer Prosecco Extra Dry, Valdobbiadene, Veneto, Italy NV 16.75 (89)

£13.95 **Corney & Barrow**

Lively pear fruit and white flowers lead the way in this stylish Prosecco. It's a little drier and more serious than some,

but has an energy and floral lift that is very appealing. **Drink** 2015-2016 **Alc** 11%



Mount Bluff, Sparkling Brut, Gisborne, New Zealand NV 16.5 (88)

£13 **Marks & Spencer**

Very developed and toasty, showing savoury and honeyed aromas, this is a hedonistic, wintry fizz that offers superb value for money. Full of bold, rustic flavour, it has mouthwatering acidity but is not for keeping. Drink now.

Drink 2015-2016 **Alc** 12%

Philippe Miche, Crémant Chardonnay, Jura, France 2012 16.25 (87)

£7.29 **Aldi**

A youthful and lively crémant that is smartly packaged, well made and great value for money if you're on a tight budget this Christmas. Gentle apple and pear fruit, a touch of cream and a fresh, lifted finish. **Drink** 2015-2016 **Alc** 12%

Sainsbury's, Taste the Difference Prosecco Superiore Brut, Conegliano, Veneto, Italy 2014 16.25 (87)

£10 **Sainsbury's**

This pale, frothy, floral fizz is one of the best inexpensive supermarket own-label Proseccos around. It is succulent, fresh and fruity on the palate, and is the perfect easy-drinking bottle to pop during the Christmas party season.

Drink 2015-2016 **Alc** 10.5%

For full details of UK stockists, see p123