

BON APPÉTIT

DECEMBER 2002

\$3.95

AMERICA'S FOOD AND ENTERTAINING MAGAZINE

| Wine & Spirits |

Tasting Panel Report

BY ANTHONY DIAS BLUE

THE TOP TEN SPARKLING WINES EDITION

Don't show up at a party empty-handed. Here are the Tasting Panel's picks for can't-miss Champagnes and sparkling wines for any occasion.

FREIXENET NV CORDON NEGRO EXTRA DRY, CAVA, SPAIN (\$10). Extra dry means this crisp Spanish alternative to Champagne is slightly sweeter than brut.



CASTELLO BANFI 2001 ROSA REGALE, BRACHETTO D'ACQUI, ITALY (\$15). Charming strawberry flavors characteristic of the Brachetto grape.

DOMAINE CHANDON NV CHANDON RICHE, CALIFORNIA (\$17). New from Chandon in the extra-dry style.



DOMAINE CARNEROS 1998 BRUT CUVÉE, NAPA (\$23). Rudy Maxa, National Public Radio's Savvy Traveler, notes that "ripe fruit backs the vibrant flavors."

PIPER-HEIDSIECK NV BRUT, CHAMPAGNE, (\$28). Excellent, affordable, and available in celebratory red packaging for the holidays.

Listed prices are approximate. The Tasting Panel meets under the direction of wine and spirits editor Anthony Dias Blue and his associates, David Gadd and Jack R. Weiner.

LAURENT-PERRIER NV BRUT, CHAMPAGNE (\$40). Joseph Nase, general manager of Aqua at the St. Regis Monarch Beach Resort & Spa in Dana Point, California, calls this French selection "pure elegance."

TAITTINGER NV CUVÉE PRESTIGE ROSÉ, CHAMPAGNE (\$43). Raspberry and cherry flavors make this perfect with fruit desserts.

CA' DEL BOSCO NV BRUT, FRANCIACORTA, ITALY (\$50). From a stellar producer that makes some of Italy's best sparkling wines. It's fragrant with apple and peach aromas.

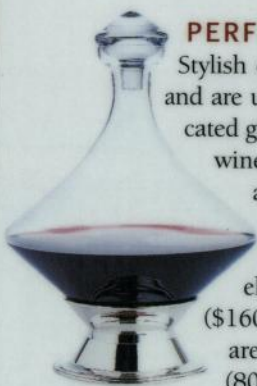
LOUIS ROEDERER 1995 BLANC DE BLANCS, CHAMPAGNE (\$72). Elegant and creamy on the palate. A very nice accompaniment to shellfish or goat cheese.



LANSON PÈRE ET FILS 1989 NOBLE CUVÉE, CHAMPAGNE (\$120). Named Best Champagne of Show at the 2002 Bon Appétit-sponsored San Francisco International Wine Competition.

PERFECT POURING

Stylish decanters add sparkle to the holiday table and are useful year-round. They also make sophisticated gifts for the wine lovers on your list. Look for wine decanters with a large surface area to allow for proper aeration of the wine, which enhances the flavor. The simple **SPIEGELAU VIVENDI DECANTER** (\$40) is a classic; the elegant six-sided **CHATEAUNEUF DECANTER** (\$160) has polished French pewter fittings. Both are available through the Wine Enthusiast (800-356-8466). Imported from



Italy, the **ORBITAL DECANTER** (above left; \$80) from Sur La Table (800-243-0852) rests in a shimmering metal stand. The traditional decoy shape of Riedel's **DUCK DECANTER** (\$225) is a favorite with sommeliers. For stores, go to riedelcrystal.com.

For fine spirits, the **MACHO DECANTER** (top; in three sizes, \$180 to \$200) by Swedish glass-maker Kosta Boda makes a bold bar-top statement with its dramatic design; it's available from Neiman Marcus (888-888-4757). With a gentle push, the pump top of Crate & Barrel's chic and clever **ROYCE DECANTER** (right; \$45) dispenses up to two ounces of your favorite brandy or whiskey. To order, call 800-323-5461.



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