

Sparkling wine is as popular as ever: Despite the economic gloom, patrons do want to indulge. Plentiful by-the-glass bubbly menus now are prevalent in bars, while Champagne bottle service sales are making a comeback in nightclubs. And while many believe (rightfully so) that it need not be reserved for special occasions, sales of sparklers traditionally bubble up over the holiday season. But will patrons splurge on celebratory bubbles this year? Bars and clubs around the nation share their expectations for sparkling wine sales and how they merchandise, market and mix effervescent sips during the all-important November and December months.

At Manhattan club Amnesia NYC, “Sparkling wine is seen as a celebratory drink,” Managing Partner Felix Parache says, noting that Champagne sales are stronger than those of other sparkling wines. The club’s newest best-selling Champagne is the limited-edition Dom Perignon Vintage 2002 Luminous Collection bottle, which illuminates lime green at the touch of a button — a dash of flair that’s a perfect addition to the glitz associated with a New Year’s Eve celebration.

The last evening of the year is definitely a time to raise a flute. “New Year’s Eve is the single biggest holiday where people drink Champagne to celebrate, and Las Vegas is one of the top New Year’s destinations,” says Meghan Baker, public relations spokesperson for MGM Grand’s Tabú nightclub.

Although Champagne accounts for just 5% of Tabú’s alcohol sales during the year, that figure spikes to 30% on New Year’s Eve.

Tabú offers 12 Champagne bottle service selections, ranging from Moët & Chandon Rosé Impérial (\$300) to high-roller favorite Ace of Spade, which sells for \$50,000. Moët & Chandon Ice Impérial (\$425) is Tabú’s most popular Champagne; meant to be enjoyed over ice, it’s packaged in a can’t-miss white and gold bottle.

At The Bubble Lounge, a Champagne and sparkling wine bar with locations in New York and San Francisco, Managing Partner Emmanuelle Chiche also consistently sees a boost in sparkling wine sales around the holiday season. She notices “a strong increase starting mid-November, more bottles sold per week compared to a regular off-holiday week and

more rosé and millésimes [vintage bottles], too.” Sparkling wine accounts for 35% of beverage sales annually at the two bars, with a 10 to 15% increase during the holiday season. Several recognizable and widely available brands continue to be guest favorites, including Bollinger, Laurent-Perrier, Taittinger and Perrier-Jouët. Trendy Grower Champagnes, such as Gaston Chiquet and Gimonnet — listed on The Bubble Lounge menu as “Farmer Fizzes” — also have a niche.

Sparkling Values

During the holidays, sales of standard bottles and Magnums at The Bubble Lounge increase, and Wine Director Lisa Wentz and her staff saber hundreds of bottles tableside. Additionally, “our special holiday bubbly deal page helps our clients discover new houses and new styles at amazing prices during the holidays,” Chiche says.

For example, the 1995 Pol Roger Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill Brut is discounted from \$435 to \$350; the 2001 Schramsberg J. Schram drops from \$140 to \$115. Each bottle that is part of the promotion arrives with a complimentary platter of strawberries and chocolate fondue.

Not surprisingly, rosé bubbly is a top seller during the months of November and December: Its attractive hue hints at cranberries, holly berries and other seasonal ingredients. Tabú offers four brands of rosé Champagne; two also are available in Magnums.

“Laurent-Perrier Rosé is the driving force of our rosé and does really well during the holidays,” Chiche notes.

At SAX, a sparkling-wine-centric bar and restaurant in Washington, D.C., Sommelier Andrew Stover points out that the ruby-tinged Lovisolo Nebbiolo Brut Rosé from Italy is a great holiday seller at \$15 a glass and \$60 a bottle.

Holiday Sparkle

Champagne and Other Bubbly Offer Spritz Appeal This Holiday Season

By Kelly A. Magyarics



At SAX (left, above) in Washington, D.C., ruby-colored rosé sparkling wines are big sellers, boosting sales and attracting new customers who want to try something different, especially during the holidays.



By featuring Champagne and sparklers prominently during the holiday season (from left to right), The Bubble Lounge in San Francisco and New York, Tabú in Las Vegas and Amnesia NYC boast higher bubbly sales.

Ruby-tinged sparkling wine cocktails can boost bubbly sales around the holidays, attracting cocktail lovers and bubbly fans looking for something new. The Bubble Lounge's year-round bubbly libations (all priced at \$14) include the Ruby Red, which mixes Couche Cuvée Selection Champagne, Stoli Raz and Chambord, and the Love Potion 29, which features a hibiscus flower floating in a flute of Domaine Chandon Brut Rosé.

Center Stage

No matter why a guest visits a venue during the holidays — whether it's to ring in the New Year, attend an employee party or get together with friends for a gift exchange — operators seeking to ramp up orders of sparkling wine need to feature the beverage front and center.

"We normally pair up with a Champagne vendor and combine some type of marketing efforts," Parache says, adding that Moët Hennessy is Amnesia NYC's long-standing partner.

At Asian-French restaurant and lounge OYA in Washington, D.C., the sparkling wine list is presented to guests as a separate menu during the holiday season. "This 'focused' approach helps us zero in on guests who might be more swayed to order sparkling wine over still wine," explains Stover, also the sommelier for OYA as well as nearby sushi lounge SEI.

Stover prides himself on seeking out off-the-beaten-path effervescent options as well as tried-and-true favorites. So, while bottles of Veuve Clicquot Yellow Label Brut (\$130) and Perrier-Jouët Brut (\$90) are popular holiday orders at OYA and SAX, Tarlant Cuvée Discobitch

Brut (\$140) — created by two Parisian DJs — also is a hot seller. The two locations notice an uptick in by-the-glass sales of Thibaut-Janisson FIZZ Blanc de Blancs from Virginia (\$13 a glass, \$55 a bottle) and Tedeschi 'Hula O Maui' Sparkling Pineapple Brut from Hawaii (\$12 a glass, \$55 a bottle.)

When the calendar gets down to a page or two, patrons are more willing to party and celebrate with friends and family. Whether they choose a bottle of vintage Champagne, a flute of domestic sparkling wine or creative fizzy cocktails, bubbly opportunities await for guests and operators alike this holiday season. **NCB**

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