

# Quentin Sadler's Wine Page

## Sharing thoughts on wine, food and travel

### In praise of sparkling wine

POSTED ON 06/02/2014 BY QUENTINSADLER

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I have been musing quite a bit about Sparkling wine over the festive period which seems so long ago now – where does time go?

I love Champagne, it is one of the greatest wine styles and wine regions in the world, but sadly I cannot often afford to drink it. Nor do I *always* want it as many other sparkling wines are wonderful wines that give a great deal of pleasure in their own right.

Which brings me on to my theme here – sparkling wine in restaurants. Very few eateries seem to want to sell me a bottle of sparkling wine, while they all want to sell me a bottle of Champagne, but of course never from the affordable end of the spectrum. It's always big names and famous brands, which is all very nice, but a bit beyond most of us except for a special occasion. But here's the thing – restauranters take note – my finances will not stretch to Champagne at restaurant prices very often, so on the very few occasions that I order Champagne I almost never order another bottle as well. If the restaurant listed a good quality sparkling wine at a fair price though I would almost certainly start with a bottle of that AND have a bottle of wine afterwards – surely I cannot be alone in that?

Few other sparkling wines quite reach that level of finesse or complexity that Champagne can reach. Few have that sensation of tension and utter purity that the chalky soils and cold climate of Champagne can achieve – *even some very good value Champagnes*

(<http://quentinsadler.wordpress.com/2013/07/22/classic-wines-at-great-value-prices/>), but there are many very good sparkling wines around that deliver all sorts of other pleasures and they deserve a fair hearing and not just to be dismissed as something 'lesser'. In truth a *good* sparkling wine is different, not inferior and can make a lovely aperitif or partner the starter, fish dishes or Chinese and Thai food beautifully as well as many other dishes.

In recent months I have tried many excellent sparkling wines and I often wonder why so few of them are available on restaurant wine lists. I have tasted lovely examples from France, Sicily, Austria, Germany, New York, Chile, California, South Africa and Spain amongst many others, here are a few that really stand out, whether for sheer quality, drinkability or value for money, they are all non vintage unless specified and all made by the traditional – or Champagne – method, so Prosecco will be covered another day:

([http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/prod\\_370121.jpg](http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/prod_370121.jpg)) Perle Noire Crémant d'Alsace  
Arthur Metz (<http://boutique.arthurmetz.fr>), Les Grands Chais de France  
(<http://www.gcfplanet.com/en/Home-2.html#>), Alsace, France

I am always drawn to Crémant d'Alsace, it seems to me that the region makes very good fizz, albeit very



different from Champagne. Mostly I favour the ones made from Pinot Blanc and Riesling, but Chardonnay is allowed too, this super example is made from 100% Auxerrois, which being a cross between *Gouais Blanc* (<http://quentinsadler.wordpress.com/2009/11/09/deep-in-the-heart-of-the-loire-tasting-a-cour-cheverny/>) and Pinot Noir shares the same parents as Chardonnay, but originates in Lorraine and is widely used in Alsace where it is normally blended into wine labelled as Pinot Blanc.

This wine has a lovely apricotty nose with the merest touch of richer raspberry and some brioche notes too. The palate is soft and the mousse slightly creamy and has nice orchard fruit characters. The wine is delicate and delicious and soft, rather than being elegant and poised, but is a very enjoyable bottle of fizz. I wish I could find this in the UK, I would love to buy it and order it in restaurants too – 87/100 points



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/b052241.png>) **Benanti Brut Noblesse Azienda Vinicola Benanti** (<http://vinicolabenanti.it/en/home/>), *Etna, Sicily, Italy*

This is a delightful sparkling wine made from Carricante grapes, grown at between 950 and 1200 metres above sea level, plus some other local grapes to add a little richness to the acidic, taut and mineral citrus notes of Carricante. It was quite delicious and hit the spot rather well before climbing up into the vineyards. A small portion of the wine is barrel fermented and it is aged on the lees over the winter before the second fermentation takes place the following Spring. After bottling it was aged for 18 months on the lees before disgorging. An attractive and enjoyable sparkling wine of excellent quality and finesse, if not great complexity – 87/100 points.



([http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/brut\\_hd1.jpg](http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/brut_hd1.jpg)) **Donnafugata Brut Metodo Classico** (<http://quentinsadler.wordpress.com/2013/07/03/wine-woman-and-song-my-visit-to-donnafugata/>)

**Donnafugata** (<http://www.donnafugata.it/pagine/Homepage.aspx>), *Sicily, Italy*

This fine Chardonnay and Pinot Noir blend was my favourite Sicilian sparkling wine of my trip last year and interestingly the grapes are purposely grown on high north-east facing slopes which protect the grapes from the sun and so preserve the grape's acids. It was nicely balanced with good fruit and acidity as well as complexity from 28 months ageing on the lees, a beautiful label too – 89/100 points.



([http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/wc\\_sparklingwine\\_pd5\\_e.jpg](http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/wc_sparklingwine_pd5_e.jpg)) **Philippe Michel Crémant de Jura Brut**  
**Jura, France**

This pure Chardonnay sparkler is an easy and affordable way to try something from the tiny Jura region of eastern France and it is very good, much better than the modest price tag would lead you to think. It is pure Chardonnay and crisp with a lean apply structure, the merest hint of toast and tends towards the firm, taut texture of Champagne, although some flourishes of subtle tropical fruit soften the plate somewhat – 85/100 points

An amazing bargain from *Aldi* (<https://www.aldi.co.uk/en/product-range/drinks/wine-cellar/sparkling-wine/sparkling-wine-product-detail-page/ps/p/philippe-michel-cremant-du-jura/>) @ £6.99



([http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/bw\\_26661\\_49bec9c1be734a9e6e6be89610319ec0.jpg](http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/bw_26661_49bec9c1be734a9e6e6be89610319ec0.jpg))

**Arestel Cava Brut**

*Cavas Arestel* (<http://www.cavas-arestel.com>), **Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, Catalunya, Spain**

I know nothing about this producer at all except that they appear to be a proper Cava House, not just a label and they supply Lidl with their Cava and it seems really very good for anything like the asking price, certainly a cut above most cheap Cava and perfect when you just want to keep drinking fizz in quantity! It is soft, dry and apply in flavour with a touch of pear too, but has a nice mouthfeel with none of that soapy quality cheap fizz can have – 84/100 points, this scores especially well for value, but really it is very well made.

Another amazing bargain this time from *Lidl* ([http://www.lidl.co.uk/cps/rde/SID-B5C09E7B-0BD8F723/www\\_lidl\\_uk/hs.xsl/3887.htm?action=showDetail&id=5171](http://www.lidl.co.uk/cps/rde/SID-B5C09E7B-0BD8F723/www_lidl_uk/hs.xsl/3887.htm?action=showDetail&id=5171)) @ £4.79



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/brut.jpg>) **Miguel Torres Pinot Noir Brut Curicó Valley, Chile**

I am always amazed by how little sparkling wine there is in Chile, most of the fizz drunk down there comes from Argentina, but there are a couple of stars, Cono Sur (<http://quentinsadler.wordpress.com/2009/09/13/wines-of-chile/>)'s delightful tank method sparkler and this beauty from Miguel Torres. This is a lovely traditional method wine with good depth of peachy orchard and raspberry red fruit, a lovely golden hue and fragrant brioche notes and flavours. Works very well and is the best Chilean fizz I have ever tasted – 88/100 points.



([http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/rmc\\_255x4541.png](http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/rmc_255x4541.png)) **2011 Codorníu Reina Maria Cristina Blanc de Noirs Brut**

*Bodegas Codorníu* (<http://www.codorniu.com/en/cavas/reina-maria-cristina-blanc-de-noirs/2>), **Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, Catalunya, Spain**

I have long been a fan of Codorníu, small bottles of their Cava – their Benjamin – were my first drink as a teenager in the discos of Spain. They invented Cava in 1872 and continue to make a wide range of delicious and high quality Cavas, but this is in a different league from most caves available in the UK. Recent vintages of this impressive wine have been pure Pinot Noir and it is that which gives the red fruit richness and depth to the palate, while floral freshness dominates the aromas. 15 months on the lees lend a touch of brioche and creaminess to the wine. If you have only tried cheap Cava in the past you owe it to yourself to give this a go – 91/100 points.

Great value for money from *Majestic* (<http://www.majestic.co.uk/Codorniu-Reina-Maria-Cristina-Blanc-de-Noirs-zid23283>) @ £14.99 – sometimes £9.99 when you buy 2



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/sparkling-pinot-noir-chardonnay-nv-150x464.png>) **Grant Burge Pinot-Noir Chardonnay Barossa Valley, Australia**

I love showing this wine at tastings as it is really very good indeed, full of character and fruit, but also elegant. The fruit comes from vineyards in the cool Adelaide Hills and Eden Valley, so there is plenty of fresh acidity, while the ripeness and the 70% of Pinot Noir – there is even a dash of Pinot Meunier – gives it a lovely deep colour with hints of red fruit. Then 30 months or so on the lees gives a richness and biscuity character that is quite delicious. Not a cheap fizz by any means, but fine, tasty, elegant and drinkable too – 90/100 points.



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/26548-250x600-bouteille-domaine-vincent-careme-ancestrale-blanc-vouvray.png>) **2011 Vouvray L'Ancestrale Domaine Vincent Carême, Vouvray, Loire Valley**

In truth I am not often an admirer of Vouvray's charms and Chenin is far from a favourite of mine, but this is stunning, which is quite a feat given that Vincent created his domaine from nothing in 1999. He now farms 14 hectares of organically grown Chenin and his wines are always interesting and often delicious, and this might well be my favourite. It is from older vines and the second fermentation takes place without the addition of any sugar or yeast, so

takes a long time – 18-24 months apparently, so the flavours build slowly. The palate is rich and appley, even apple pie at times and the finish has a touch of sweetness that blanches the acidity beautifully and adds to the feeling of richness. A real hedonists wine – 91/100 points.



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/domaine-saint-just-domaine-saint-just-cremant-de-loire-blanc-blanc-2056-994.jpg>) **Crémant de Loire Brut**

**Domaine Saint Just, Saumur, Loire Valley**

Wouldn't you know it, in one breath I tell you how little I like Chenin Blanc and here I am telling you about another superb wine made from it – hey ho that is the beauty of wine I suppose – although in this case 40% Chardonnay adds more elegance I think. This wine is beautiful too, poised, elegant and refined with rich fruit, zesty citrus acidity and some delicately honeyed, biscuity, richness on the long classy finish. If we could prise some of this away from the French and Chinese I think it would prove very popular in the UK – 92/100 points.



([http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/idshot\\_150x300.jpg](http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/idshot_150x300.jpg)) **Tesco Finest**

**Blanquette de Limoux Cuvée 1531**

**Limoux, Languedoc-Roussillon**

It isn't always easy to try this wine in the UK, which is a shame as it can be very good indeed. Limoux is in cathar country near Carcassonne and claims to have been making sparkling wine longer than Champagne has. This Chardonnay, Chenin and Mauzac – aka Blanquette – blend is pretty classy and elegant with a herbaceous character, from the Mauzac and lovely citrus acidity, apply fruit and yes a bit of toast too. This example is just off-dry – 87/100 points.



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/0003bb761e6401.jpg>) **2008 Lorigos Bruto Bacalhoa Vinhos** (<http://www.bacalhoa.com/default.htm>), Portugal

Portugal isn't often seen as a good fizz producer, but really should be, the few I have tried have been very good indeed. Bacalhoa produce some very good examples at the beautiful Quinta de Lorigos near the fabulous town of Obidos near Lisbon. The Chardonnay Brut is very good too, but my favourite is this Castelão and Arinto blend. Castelao is a red grape, while Arinto is a superb high acid white grape and together they give a lovely taut red apple character and real depth. A very good wine – 90/100 points.



(<http://quentinsadler.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/imagewine.aspx.jpeg>) **2010 Villiera Brut Natural Chardonnay**

**Villiera** (<http://www.villiera.com/default.aspx?CLIENTID=3484>), Stellenbosch, South Africa

This is a wine very dear to my heart, my good friends Dave and Lorna Hughes live right next to the vineyard these Chardonnay grapes come from and I have often enjoyed a few glasses with them while in Stellenbosch. It is very good, very elegant, very refined, delicate, mineral and crisp apple fruit. Again the second fermentation takes place without the addition of yeast or sugar and the wine is aged for 3 years on the lees – 91/100 points.

Superb value for money from *Marks & Spencer* (<http://www.marksandspencer.com/Villiera-Brut-Natural-Chardonnay-2010/dp/B000WIXKK2>) @ £10.99

## In Conclusion

Of course I could carry on, but you get the picture, there are lovely sparkling wines produced everywhere, so don't get stuck in a rut, it does not have to be Champagne every time – restauranters take note, sommeliers please listen – nor does every alternative have to be Prosecco. Be adventurous, find something new and exciting.

POSTED IN MY THOUGHTS, MY VIEW, SPARKLING WINE, WINE | TAGGED ALSACE, ARESTEL CAVA BRUT, ARTHUR METZ, AUSTRALIA, AZIENDA VINICOLA BENANTI, BACALHOA VINHOS, BENANTI BRUT NOBLESSE, BLANQUETTE DE LIMOUX, BLANQUETTE DE LIMOUX CUVÉE 1531, CATALUNYA, CAVAS ARESTEL, CHILE, CODORNÍU REINA MARIA CRISTINA BLANC DE NOIRS BRUT, CODORNIU, CRÉMANT, CRÉMANT D'ALSACE, CRÉMANT DE JURA, CRÉMANT DE JURA BRUT, CRÉMANT DE LOIRE BRUT, CRÉMANT DE LOIRE BRUT DOMAINE

SAINT JUST, DOMAINE SAINT JUST, DOMAINE VINCENT CARÊME, DONNAFUGATA, DONNAFUGATA BRUT METODO CLASSICO, ETNA, FRANCE, GRANT BURGE PINOT-NOIR CHARDONNAY BAROSSA VALLEY, ITALY, JURA, LES GRANDS CHAIS DE FRANCE, LOIRE VALLEY, LORIDOS BRUTO, LORIDOS BRUTO BACALHOA VINHOS, MIGUEL TORRES PINOT NOIR BRUT CURICÓ VALLEY, PERLE NOIRE, PERLE NOIRE CRÉMANT D'ALSACE, PHILIPPE MICHEL CRÉMANT DE JURA BRUT, PORTUGAL, SANT SADURNÍ D'ANOIA, SAUMUR, SICILY, SOUTH AFRICA, SPAIN, STELLENBOSCH, VILLIERA BRUT, VILLIERA BRUT NATURAL CHARDONNAY VILLIERA, VOUVRAY, VOUVRAY L'ANCESTRALE

## 6 thoughts on “In praise of sparkling wine”

1. *Carolyn* 06/02/2014 AT 3:40 PM  
Lovely comments on RMC – thanks Quentin

Reply

*quentinsadler*

06/02/2014 AT 4:22 PM

Pleasure, it's a lovely wine.

Reply

2. *Johan* 06/02/2014 AT 8:11 PM  
All Nice bubbles, but how About Greek sparkling?

Reply

*quentinsadler*

06/02/2014 AT 11:34 PM

Yes, I would love to, but none of the examples that I have tasted were that exciting frankly. I am sure there are one or two, but they have not yet come my way.

Reply

3. Pingback: In praise of sparkling wine | Quentin Sadler's Wine Page | Which Wine Is Sweet

4. *Tom Stevenson* 07/02/2014 AT 6:13 PM  
I was of the same opinion Quentin, until I came across Laurens Hartman at Domaine Karanika, in the high altitude Amyndeo region, not far from the Macedonian and Albanian borders. I am convinced that 99 per cent of all the best brut-style sparkling wines will always be made from one or more of the classic Champagne varieties, but that is not to say that other varieties cannot succeed, as some of your wines above illustrate. And from the 2010-based second release of Domaine Karanika sparkling wine (but not the 2009 blend), Laurens has shown that Xinomavro could be one of those other successful varieties: <http://www.karanika.com/new/en/index.php?id=1>

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