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SOMMELIER ROUNDTABLE

Sommelier Roundtable: Valentine’s Day–Worthy Wines

Seven wine pros from Restaurant Award winners suggest romance-sparking selections for Champagne and beyond



Darker, richer rosé sparklers are one way to switch up the usual Valentine's Day Champagne, according to these wine experts. (CatLane)



Feb 10, 2021

Especially for couples celebrating this year’s Valentine’s Day at home, a memorable wine can make the evening. While it can be tempting to reach for that go-to bottle of bubbly, there are benefits to branching out, like the shared experience of discovering a new wine together.

So what to pull for your sweetheart? Seven sommeliers from *Wine Spectator* Restaurant Award winners are here to offer some expert advice. Their picks do include some stellar Champagnes, but the pros also point to sweet dessert-wine stunners, lesser-known favorites, charming on-theme bottles and more.

Wine Spectator: What’s a special wine you’d recommend for Valentine’s Day?

Sanae Halprin, sommelier at the **Bellagio**
[\https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/search/q/criterion=hotel_resort%253A%2522Bellagio%2522in_Las_Vegas

Saint-Amour Beaujolais because of its romantic name. Contrary to the perception of simple wine, Beaujolais wines from this *cru* are serious, which is very suggestive for the occasion. Also, [Château Calon-Ségur St.-Estèphe](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Ch%C3%A2teau%20Calon-S%C3%A9gur%20St.-Est%C3%A8phe&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=1) [\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Ch%C3%A2teau%20Calon-S%C3%A9gur%20St.-Est%C3%A8phe&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=1. Not only for its heart-shaped label, but the wine also reminds me of bitter chocolate.

Justin Chin, beverage director at **Hina Yakitori**
[\[https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/5691/hina-yakitori\]](https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/5691/hina-yakitori) in San Francisco

Not to be too Hallmark-y or cliché, but I pick Champagne for sure. Brut rosé, more specifically. If I had to pick a producer, it would be [André Clouet](#)

[\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Anc, hands down. It’s very sentimental to me.

I had a personal experience three years ago with my wife. We went there the first week of March—we missed out on Valentine’s Day with my schedule at the restaurant, so that was the only time I could get out. We actually got invited by Jean-François Clouet himself. He’s been the winemaker for a long time now, and it was just so intimate. The guy picked us up in his Range Rover, took us up to the vineyards in Bouzy, gave his whole family history for, like, half an hour, and I learned everything about him and his family ... then we hung out in his 18th-century cottage in the town of Champagne and we had lunch. It was just so memorable, and romantic as well.

Jessica Altieri, director of beverage for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts in Palm Beach, Fla.

I fell in love with [Donnafugata's Ben Ryé Passito di Pantelleria](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Donnafugata%20Passito%20di%20Pantelleria%20Ben%20Ry%C3%A9&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Donnafugata%20Passito%20di%20Pantelleria%20Ben%20Ry%C3%A9&text_search](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Donnafugata%20Passito%20di%20Pantelleria%20Ben%20Ry%C3%A9&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc) the first time I visited Sicily. Made from 100 percent dried Zibibbo grapes, this Sicilian wine is sweet, heaven in a glass. Filled with delicious honey, dried apricot and tangerine notes and a silky, yet bright lingering finish.

If sweet isn’t your thing and you’re looking to splurge with that steak dinner, then try to get your hands on [Penfolds](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Per) [\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Per ’g3, a wine blended from three Grange vintages spanning seven years: 2008, 2012 and 2014. This will forever be a very special wine in my sipping Rolodex, as I first shared a bottle with their winemaker, Peter Gago, while in Hong Kong for its launch.

Eric Perejda, sommelier at Beano's Cabin [\[https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/241/beano's-cabin\]](https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/241/beano's-cabin) in Beaver Creek, Colo.

I can think of a few fun ways to tie in wine for this special occasion: Change up your Champagne habit and splurge on a rosé from your favorite Champagne house or grower Champagne. Consider treating yourself and your soulmate to a French Pinot Noir from Chambolle-Musigny. Arguably the best of the *premiers crus* in this commune come from [Les Amoureuses](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Les%20Amoureuses&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc) [\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Les%20Amoureuses&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc (“the lovers”) vineyard.

Or, if Cabernet [Sauvignon]–based wines are more your speed, a third-growth Bordeaux estate, [Calon-Ségur](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Calon-S%C3%A9gur&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc) [\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Calon-S%C3%A9gur&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc, adorns a heart on its label—we have listed the [the 2009](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/detail/source/search/note_id/279469) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/detail/source/search/note_id/279469\]](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/detail/source/search/note_id/279469) at Beano’s Cabin, and it is a personal favorite from St.-Estèphe commune. [Craggy Range](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Craggy) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Cra](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Craggy) winery in New Zealand produces a [Martinborough Pinot by the name Aroha](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Craggy%20Range%20Martinborough%20Aroha&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Craggy%20Range%20Martinborough%20Aroha&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vint](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Craggy%20Range%20Martinborough%20Aroha&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&priceloc), Māori for “love.” Valentine’s dinner would also be the perfect opportunity to reconnect memories of that great trip you took together to a wine-producing region.

Whatever you choose, you can make it your own with a touch of extra thinking and preparation.

Shanning Newell, head sommelier at Bourbon Steak [\[https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/5320/bourbon-steak\]](https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/5320/bourbon-steak) in Nashville

One my favorite wines that we’ll be offering at Bourbon Steak Nashville for Valentine’s Day is the [Coup de Foudre](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Coup) [\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search/submitted/Y/search_by/exact/text_search_flag/winery/winery/Cou line. *Coup de Foudre*, meaning a flash of lightning [in French], refers more specifically to the moment when “lightning strikes,” or a special moment that you want to capture forever. The

wine’s origin has a very romantic story behind it, and one of my favorite aspects of this wine is that the label peels off to reveal a section for notes so one can inscribe who the wine was shared with, where the wine was enjoyed, and why. So romantic!

**Ryan McLoughlin, head sommelier at [Georgian Room](#)
[\[https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/1403/georgian-room\]](https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/1403/georgian-room) in Sea Island, Ga.**

There’s nothing better than to share a bottle of rosé Champagne. I like more of the [saignée](#)
[\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/what-is-a-saignee-rose\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/what-is-a-saignee-rose) style of rosés: a little bit richer, darker fruit and darker quality of a rosé. [René Geoffroy’s Rosé de Saignée](#)
https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Ren%C3%A9%20Geoffroy%20Ros%C3%A9%20Saign%C3%A9e&text_search_flag=, in a half-bottle, is a perfect suggestion for a couple starting their Valentine’s meal off.

But also, if you don’t want to go and spend your dollar on a really expensive rosé Champagne, finish the meal with chocolate and a glass of [Brachetto d’Acqui](#)
https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Brachetto%20d%27Acqui&text_search_flag=wine_plus_vintage&search_by=all&sc, from either Banfi’s Rosa Regale, or Demarie wines makes a beautiful Brachetto called Birbet. I think a Northern Italian, sweeter red sparkling is a fun, fun finish to a Valentine’s meal.

**Hannah Barton, assistant sommelier at [Heron's](#)
[\[https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/1328/herons\]](https://www.winespectator.com/restaurants/1328/herons) in Cary, N.C.**

Anne-Sophie Dubois Les Cocottes Fleurie, a delicious and well-made wine that I would describe as being “pretty.” It’s intensely floral, bursting with red fruits like strawberry and cherry, and very bright in flavor and color. Flowers, strawberries, bright red—does it get any more Valentine’s than that?

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