



Brut: Traditional Method Sparkling Wine

Of the many techniques used to produce sparkling wine, the “traditional method” is certainly the most labor intensive. Although this is how Champagne is produced, it is important to note that the term Champagne can only be used in reference to wines grown and produced in the Champagne region of Northern France.



- **Vinification:** As was first practiced in Champagne, traditionally made sparkling wines start out as still, white wine. From there, the wines are bottled along with the addition of a small amount of yeast and sugar. This “liquor de tirage” causes a second fermentation to take place in the sealed environment of the wine’s bottle, trapping the carbon dioxide produced by the yeast and forcing it to dissolve into the wine.
- **Autolysis & Bottle Aging:** After the completion of the second fermentation, the yeast will die off and form what is called “lees”. Over time, as these yeast cells decompose and interact with the components of the wine, unique flavor and aroma characteristics will begin to develop. Fresh bread, dough, biscuits, and toast are all common descriptors for these characteristics. The longer the wine is permitted to age along with the lees, the more prominent this autolytic character will be.
- **Disgorging & Dosage:** In order to remove the lees and other sediments, the bottles are slowly turned upside down in a process called “riddling”. After all of the solids have collected in the neck, the bottle is submerged in subfreezing brine, forming the sediments into a frozen plug. The temporary bottle cap is then removed and the bottle’s internal pressure forces the plug out. At this time, reserve wine and a small dash of sugar is added to refill the bottle and bring balance to the wine’s structure.
- **Serving:** Most sparkling wines are best served well chilled (around 43-50F). Using a champagne flute will prolong the life of the wine’s bubbles, but a regular white wine glass will best present the wine’s aromas and flavors.