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CHAMPAGNE-STYLE SPARKLERS, MADE IN AMERICA

by Eric Asimov



I'll drink sparkling wine almost anytime, wherever it comes from, however it's served.

I'm an anomaly. The vast proportion of sparkling wine is consumed in the last quarter of the year, primarily at holiday parties and New Year's celebrations.

Often, that wine is Champagne. Sometimes it's a wine inspired by Champagne, made by the same method, using the same set of grapes or both. And sometimes it's a sparkling wine that has nothing to do with Champagne, like pétillant naturel, made using the oldest method of producing sparkling wine, with any grapes you like.

Sparkling wine lovers may feel a little lucky this season, especially if they like sparklers from France or Spain. The 25 percent tariff that recently went into effect on certain European foods, drinks and other products specifically exempts sparkling wines, for unspecified reasons.

Nonetheless, this year I thought it would be fun to examine wines that rarely receive much attention: American sparkling wines made in the Champagne style. These wines tend to be less expensive than equivalent Champagnes, tariff or not.

Here are the bottles I recommend:

Gruet American Sparkling Wine Brut NV \$15...

Gruet, a longtime purveyor of moderately priced sparkling wine, is based in New Mexico. Its higher-end bottles carry New Mexico appellations. But the nonvintage brut is made in such quantity, the company says, that it must supplement its New Mexican grapes with grapes from three other states: California, Oregon and Washington...

These wines ought to be versatile with food. Try them with fried chicken, or popcorn, both classic pairings (at least for me). Or with seafood or sushi. Yes, serve them cold, yet not so icy that all nuance is lost. No need to haul out the ceremonial flutes. Ordinary wine glasses are better.