



WINE

Forget Prosecco: French Crémants Should Be Your Champagne Alternative

Photographer: Adam Droblec / EyeEm/EyeEm

Here are 12 great bottles to seek out now.

By **Elin McCoy**

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Made by the same method as Champagne, French crémants are the latest buzz-grabbers in the expanding bubbly universe—and a wise choice if you're looking to move on from boring prosecco. Think of them as the underdogs of the French wine world, offering sophisticated Gallic flair without the Champagne price tag.

“Crémant” is an official term used throughout France for fine sparkling wines made outside Champagne by the “methode traditionnelle.” That’s the process by which wines get their bubbles from a second fermentation inside the bottle, then age for months on the spent yeast cells left behind, giving them character and a creamier texture.

For decades, places known for great reds and whites—including Burgundy, Alsace, the Loire Valley, and even Bordeaux—have been making under-the-radar sparkling wines, but crémant first appeared officially on labels only in the mid-1970s. Eight regions can now use the term for their fizz; the latest addition is Savoie, in the Alps. (Beaujolais also wants in, hoping to tap into global demand for fizz, which is projected to grow 14 percent by 2020; it aims to gain appellation status for sparkling gamay in a few years.)



Bottles of crémant d'Alsace sparkling wine are pictured during the disgorging process, on August 12, 2016, in Steinbach, France. Photographer: PATRICK HERTZOG/AFP

Unlike Champagne, a bubbly that's almost always chardonnay and/or pinot noir—and sometimes pinot meunier—crémants often rely at least partly on local varieties. In the Loire, that means chenin blanc; in Alsace, pinot blanc, as well as auxerrois; and in Savoie, jacquere and altesse. So don't expect them to taste exactly like Champagne.

Naturally (this is France, after all) the law regulates the percentages of specific grapes and the amount of necessary aging, and it dictates hand-harvesting and gentle pressing, but each region contributes some rules of its own. The best producers make versions from single vineyards and routinely age their wines longer, and it shows.

Here's my selection of top examples from five regions.

Crémant d'Alsace

Picturesque Alsace, in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains of northeast France, produces more than 50 percent of all French crémants. Many are excellent and more widely available than examples from other regions.



Source: Vendors

NV Jean-Baptiste Adam Brut Rosé (\$21)

Super frothy, with intense strawberry fruit flavors, this pale, pink wine has mouthwatering appeal, zing, and a succulent elegance.

NV Domaine Saint-Remy Brut Cuvée Prestige (\$24)

Bright and crisp, ideal for an aperitif, this bottle has notes of plums and golden delicious apples and shows off very fine, tiny bubbles.

NV Jean-Baptiste Adam Brut Les Natures (\$25)

This organic and biodynamic domaine has been growing grapes for more than 400 years. A light, elegant blend of pinot blanc, chardonnay, and pinot noir, this bottling has subtle citrus-y charm and fresh apple-y purity.

2015 Albert Mann Extra Brut (\$26)

Deep and creamy, this full-bodied blend of pinot blanc, auxerrois, and pinot noir from a family estate tastes of tart, spicy apples.

Domaine Valentin Zusslin Brut Zero San Soufre (\$30)

A brother-and-sister team makes this very dry, crisp, complex blend of auxerrois, riesling, and chardonnay at a biodynamic estate. Natural-wine lovers take note: It's made with no added sulfur.