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2024 ...
Explore the most exciting wines of the year!

TASTING REPORTS

A New World of Bubbly

The latest releases from U.S. sparkling wine producers balance tradition and innovation



Roederer Estate winemaker Arnaud Weyrich produced six Anderson Valley bottlings for this year's tasting, all scoring 92 points or higher. (Courtesy of Roederer)



By Tim Fish

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American sparkling wine producers boast about their *tête de cuvées* [<https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=t%C3%AAt+de+cuv%C3%A9e>] and late-disgorged [<https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=disgorged>] bottlings—and rightfully so, since they present the ultimate expression of the house style. But these

rarefied offerings, which often fetch \$100 or more a bottle, are not the producers' most important wines. That honor is reserved for their non-vintage cuvées.

"Your non-vintage is your bread and butter," explains [Roederer Estate](#)

[\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate)

[submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate\]](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate) winemaker Arnaud Weyrich. The

Anderson Valley winery sometimes skips a vintage of its tête de cuvée, [L'Ermitage](#)

[\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate)

[submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate+L%E2%80%99Ermitage&text_search_flag=everything&search_by](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate)

, for that reason. "Even if it's a good vintage, you have to hold back some of the best lots to keep your non-vintage to the standard."

That seems consistent with my recent tastings of nearly 100 sparkling wines from the U.S. for this report. In many cases, the non-vintage wines show surprisingly well compared with the tête de cuvées. Since my previous report ("[Sparkling Traditions](#) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/2023-united-states-sparkling-wine-tasting-report-123123\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/2023-united-states-sparkling-wine-tasting-report-123123)," Dec. 31, 2023 - Jan. 15, 2024), I have reviewed wines from California, Oregon, Washington and New Mexico in blind tastings at our Napa office.

Unlike still wine producers, which generally release a new vintage about the same time every year, bubbly houses have an eclectic schedule of releases. Non-vintage cuvées—blends of multiple vintages—are released first. In California, non-vintage wines are typically about two years old, meaning a bottle you buy in 2024 is mostly wine from 2022. Even the many U.S. producers that don't make non-vintage wines maintain their own release schedule for vintage bottlings. Some have 2021s out now, while others are releasing 2019s or older vintages. It all depends on the type of bubbly being made and the house style.

The best non-vintage cuvées offer both quality and value. The [Roederer Estate Brut Anderson Valley NV](#) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1315013/name/roederer-estate-brut-anderson-valley--1\]](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1315013/name/roederer-estate-brut-anderson-valley--1) (93 points, \$32) frequents the top ranks every year, and the current release is dynamic yet sleekly elegant. The [Schramsberg Brut North Coast Mirabelle 33rd Bottling NV](#) [\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-

detail/id/1312037/name/schramsberg-brut-north-coast-mirabelle-33rd-bottling--1] (91, \$31) is plush yet vibrant, with a lilting mix of baked apple and strawberry flavors. Paula Kornell's Brut California NV [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1305321/name/paula-kornell-brut-california--1>] (90, \$22) is expressive and vivacious, while Louis Pommery's Brut Rosé California NV [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1311788/name/louis-pommery-brut-ros%C3%A9-california--1>] (89, \$27) is fragrant with rose petal and strawberry blossoms. Snappy and sleek, Mumm Napa's Brut California Prestige NV [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1313674/name/mumm-napa-brut-california-prestige--1>] (89, \$24) features expressive Meyer lemon and strawberry notes.



Schramsberg cellars in Napa Valley age many of their sparkling wines using méthode traditionnelle. (Sara Sangar)

“Winemakers from the world of Champagne [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/champagne-tasting-report-sparkling-splendor-121524>] and sparkling wine want to limit the effect of vintage,” Weyrich says. “We don’t want

every vintage or cuvée to taste identical, but we are providing a house style that people like, and we don't want to erase that." Branding is important in Champagne, he explains. "Customers aren't saying, 'I'm drinking Champagne.' They are very specific: 'I am drinking Bollinger or Roederer,' or 'I'm drinking Taittinger.'"

U.S. sparkling wines may not have reached the same level of devoted exclusivity as Champagne, but they have built an impressive track record with their own tête de cuvées. No winemaker had a better year than Weyrich, who made several top sparklers. The **Roederer Estate Brut Anderson Valley L'Ermitage 2017** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1307464/name/roederer-estate-brut-anderson-valley-l%27ermitage-2017>] (94, \$75) is opulent yet detailed, with pear and cherry flavors accented by roasted hazelnut, brioche and fresh ginger. More classic is the luxurious **Roederer Estate Brut Anderson Valley L'Ermitage Late Disgorged 2006** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1315014/name/roederer-estate-brut-anderson-valley-l%27ermitage-late-disgorged-2006>] (95, \$120), showing notes of baked apple, brioche and roasted hazelnut.

Other leading sparklers in this report include Domaine Chandon's sumptuous and vivacious **Étoile Tête de Cuvée Los Carneros 2015** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1314767/name/domaine-chandon-%C3%A9toile-t%C3%A9te-de-cuv%C3%A9e-los-carneros-2015>] (94, \$111), which shows richly layered flavors of baked apple and Asian pear, and **J** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=J>] 's plush and decadent **Brut Russian River Valley Late Disgorged 2015** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1305734/name/j-brut-russian-river-valley-late-disgorged-2015>] (94, \$110), with crème brûlée and roasted hazelnut accents. The **Schramsberg J. Schram Rosé North Coast 2015** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1307530/name/schramsberg-j.-schram-ros%C3%A9-north-coast-2015>] (94, \$180) is rich and extravagant, with generous apple pie and cherry flavors laced with roasted almond brioche.

Late-disgorged cuvées particularly stood out this year, starting with the **J Brut**. Several others impressed me as well. The **Argyle Brut Willamette Valley Extended Tirage 2013** [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1312387/name/argyle-brut-willamette->

[valley-extended-tirage-2013](#)] (93, \$85) is a handsome sparkler that reveals maturity but remains vibrant; the [Domaine Carneros Brut Carneros Late Disgorged 2017](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1308855/name/domaine-carneros-brut-carneros-late-disgorged-2017>] (93, \$59) blends freshness with hints of maturity and creamy richness; and the [Gloria Ferrer Rosé Carneros Carneros Cuvée Late Disgorged 2018](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1312180/name/gloria-ferrer-ros%C3%A9-carneros-carneros-cuv%C3%A9e-late-disgorged-2018>] (93, \$95) is plush yet crisply styled, with strawberry pie and rose petal tones.

This style of late-disgorged bubbly is aged for additional years in the bottle and on the yeast, typically 10 to 20 years longer than standard cuvées in California. The chemical explanation is complex, but the upshot is that the yeast and its byproducts help protect the wine from oxidation. After extended aging, the bottle [cap-like seal](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=cap>] is removed, the dead yeast extracted and the *dosage* added before corking. “There is a sense of richness from that yeast contact,” Weyrich says. “It tastes younger than it is, but it’s richer than a young wine.”

Grower Champagnes have caught the fancy of Europe and America alike, but U.S. producers have been slow to claim a similar title. The phrase refers to wineries that grow, vinify and age their own wines. They’re often smaller, family-owned houses making a very personal statement on sparkling wine. There are some sparkling houses that would fit that bill—[Iron Horse](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Iron+Horse>] and [Roederer Estate](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&scope=ratings&winery=Roederer+Estate>] both use only estate grapes—and perhaps the category will be more important in the future.

An extension of the grower-producer movement is a focus on [single-vineyard bubbly](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=single-vineyard>] . Single-vineyard versions of [Cabernet Sauvignon](#) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/cabernet-sauvignon-57803>] and [Chardonnay](#)

[\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/chardonnay-57804\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/chardonnay-57804) are common, but they are rare with sparkling wine. That's starting to change as a handful of producers explore the idea. Argyle in Oregon has made them in the past, while Weyrich is trying his hand with two new offerings, the [Roederer Estate Clark Road Vineyard Sparkling Anderson Valley 2020](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1315012/name/roederer-estate-clark-road-vineyard-sparkling-anderson-valley-2020) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1315012/name/roederer-estate-clark-road-vineyard-sparkling-anderson-valley-2020\]](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1315012/name/roederer-estate-clark-road-vineyard-sparkling-anderson-valley-2020) (92, \$55), a refined and handsomely structured cuvée, and the yet-to-be-released Roederer Estate Apple Alley Vineyard Sparkling Anderson Valley 2020.

While Champagne has farmed vineyards for generations, California is a young wine region. The first Roederer Estate vines in Anderson Valley were planted in 1984. "After 40 years, we feel more confident of being able to talk about very specific parts of the vineyards," Weyrich says.

Clark Road is on the west end of Anderson Valley, closest to the ocean. Planted in 1999, it produces some of the estate's best [Pinot Noir](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/pinot-noir-57812) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/pinot-noir-57812\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/pinot-noir-57812). "It gets more fog cooling early in the day and then fog later in the day. It's always the vineyard picked last in the season, so there's a slightly longer hang time of that fruit on the vines, which is a good thing," notes Weyrich.

Apple Alley vineyard is near the winery on the estate ranch, which was originally an apple orchard. Predominately Chardonnay, it was planted in 1984, and some of the vines are still producing.

"I can get that citrus-driven acidity from the Chardonnay, but it can ripen nicely without becoming flabby," Weyrich says. I look forward to tasting Apple Alley when it's released late this year. Meanwhile, I'll be watching for other sparkling producers to try their hand at single-vineyard bottlings now that their vineyards are maturing. I'll be excited to see what new offerings emerge in the future.



Domaine Chandon in Napa Valley is one of the leading producers of California sparkling wine, with seven bottles tasted for this year's report. (Courtesy of Domaine Chandon)

Tim Fish's Recommended U.S. Sparkling Wines

Nearly 100 wines were tasted for this report. A [free alphabetical list](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/alphabetical-guide-to-u-s-sparkling-wines-123124) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/alphabetical-guide-to-u-s-sparkling-wines-123124] is available. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted over the past year—including all vintage and non-vintage [U.S. sparkling wines](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&pricelov) [https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=-1&scorehigh=-1&pricelov]—using the online [Wine Ratings search](http://www.winespectator.com/wines/search) [http://www.winespectator.com/wines/search] .

Roederer Estate

Brut Anderson Valley L'Ermitage Late Disgorged 2006

Score: 95 | \$120

WS Review: A luxurious version, with baked apple, brioche and roasted hazelnut flavors highlighted by steely acidity and ending with a luscious finish.

Domaine Chandon

Étoile Tête de Cuvée Los Carneros 2015

Score: 94 | \$111

WS Review: A vivacious sparkler, with richly layered baked apple and Asian pear flavors highlighted by caramel brioche, roasted hazelnut and spices.

J

Brut Russian River Valley Late Disgorged 2015

Score: 94 | \$110

WS Review: Plush and appealingly decadent, delivering rich baked apple, crème brûlée and roasted hazelnut flavors that finish on an opulent accent.

Schramsberg

J. Schram Blancs North Coast 2015

Score: 94 | \$150

WS Review: Dynamic, with polished flavors of baked apple, Asian pear, brioche and roasted hazelnut that build richness on the plush finish.

Argyle

Brut Willamette Valley Extended Tirage 2013

Score: 93 | \$85

WS Review: This handsome sparkler reveals maturity but remains vibrant, with baked pear and Meyer lemon laced with roasted hazelnut and spices.

Domaine Carneros

Blanc de Blancs Carneros Le Rêve 2016

Score: 93 | \$125

WS Review: Vivacious and elegantly luxurious, showing Asian pear, brioche, fresh ginger and blanched almond flavors that glide on the sleek finish.

Gloria Ferrer

Rosé Carneros Carneros Cuvée Late Disgorged 2018

Score: 93 | \$95

WS Review: Plush yet crisply styled, with strawberry pie, rose petal, roasted hazelnut and spice notes that show freshness plus a touch of maturity.

Soter

Extra Brut Willamette Valley Reserve NV

Score: 93 | \$70

WS Review: Delicate and sleek, with elegant Meyer lemon and strawberry flavors accented by blanched almond and honeysuckle on the steely finish.

Iron Horse

Blanc de Blancs Green Valley of Russian River Valley Reflection 2019

Score: 92 | \$75

WS Review: This sparkler is graceful yet dynamic, featuring detailed flavors of lemon, green apple, saline and blanched almond.

Roco

Brut Willamette Valley RMS 2020

Score: 91 | \$65

WS Review: Bright and vibrant, this version offers refreshing apple, lemon and yeasty spice flavors that zip along the finish.

Cuvaison

Brut Cuvée Los Carneros 2020

Score: 90 | \$60

WS Review: Precise and expressive, this offers rich flavors of baked apple accented by strawberry and toasty spices before finishing on a zesty note.

Goldeneye

Brut Rosé Anderson Valley 2020

Score: 90 | \$72

WS Review: This rosé bursts with vivid cherry blossom aromas, showing vibrant, refreshing cherry and lemon flavors that zip along the bright finish.

Paula Kornell

Brut California NV

Score: 90 | \$22

WS Review: Expressive and vivacious, showing pretty apple and lime flavors laced with notes of vanilla and spices before finishing on a zesty accent.

Bon Vivant

California NV

Score: 89 | \$20

WS Review: A steely and vibrant version, with lively citrus and apple flavors that zip along the refreshing finish.

Gruet

Blanc de Noirs American NV

Score: 89 | \$17

WS Review: Festive and lively, offering apple and strawberry flavors that build richness and gain spice notes toward the finish.

Mumm Napa

Prestige Cuvée Napa County NV

Score: 89 | \$33

WS Review: This attractive sparkler is well-crafted and lively, with flavors of apple, lemon, spices and fresh ginger that linger on the snappy finish.

Gruet

Blanc de Blancs American NV

Score: 88 | \$17

WS Review: This is appealing for the generous, zesty flavors of baked apple and nectarine that build richness and spice notes on the finish.

Scharffenberger

Brut Rosé Mendocino County NV

Score: 88 | \$29

WS Review: A fruit-forward quaff, with lively strawberry, lemon and graham cracker flavors that zip along the refreshing finish.

Domaine Ste. Michelle

Brut Columbia Valley NV

Score: 87 | \$13

WS Review: This snappy sparkler features flavors of pear, lemon and spices.