

YEAR'S BEST US SPARKLING WINES

Our blind panels tasted **125** new-release US wines over the past 12 months. Our critics rated **9** as exceptional (90+) and **3** as Best Buys. **Joshua Greene** reviews California wines; **Patrick J. Comiskey** reviews New York, North Carolina Oregon and Washington wines. *Find a complete list of wines tasted and all reviews at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.*

CALIFORNIA



94 | Iron Horse \$89
2004 Green Valley of Russian River Valley Brut LD This is David Munksgard's top selection from the Sterling family's estate, disgorged in August 2013 after eight years on the lees in bottle. An equal blend of chardonnay (lending apple-skin crispness) and pinot noir (providing bass notes and flavor depth), this wine starts from a tight place and finishes with brisk richness. In between, the flavors have resonance, from delicate high notes of spice and fresh cream to darker tones of minerals, baked apple and caramel. The lasting impression is elegant, clean and lively. Have a bottle ready to chill when Dungeness crabs come into season. (250 cases) *Iron Horse Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA*



92 | Iron Horse \$40
2008 Green Valley of Russian River Valley Russian Cuvée Enriched by a higher dosage than the Classic Vintage, this wine has plenty of pink grapefruit zest acidity to completely balance that sweetness and come across as broad and nutty. There's a pale cucumber and apple crispness to the flavor, delicious on its own or with a clambake. (800 cases) *Iron Horse Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA*



92 | Iron Horse \$38
2008 Green Valley of Russian River Valley Classic Vintage Brut Pale and creamy with the scent of a pear just coming into ripeness, this is a clean sparkler with flavor development in the matrix of fruit and lees. The flavors last, ready for oysters. (2,300 cases) *Iron Horse Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA*



92 | Roederer Estate \$47
2004 Anderson Valley L'Ermitage Brut Blended from a selection of grapes from Roederer's estate vineyards, this includes four percent of barrel-aged reserve wine from the 2000 harvest. While chardonnay outweighs pinot noir (52 percent to 48), the flavors are more in the red fruit realm, with the fragrance of fresh raspberries. The wine's yeasty maturity measures that fruit into an enticing aroma, while the citrus underpinning of chardonnay lengthens the flavor, keeping the structure tight and fine. A light, crisp vintage of L'Ermitage, this would be delicious with poached salmon for brunch. *Roederer Estate, Philo, CA*



91 | Schramsberg \$140

2005 North Coast J. Schram Vintage Rosé

Keith Hock and Hugh Davies blend this wine from selected lots focused on vineyards in Carneros (including Hyde and Hudson), Mendocino (Husch), the Sonoma Coast and Marin. The varietal composition emphasizes chardonnay (79 percent), while pinot noir contributes the flavors—raspberry gelée, the pink of peach skin and other touches of red fruit. It feels youthful after seven years on the yeast, refreshing in its fine bubbles and gentle, fruit-driven flavors. A sleek and festive aperitif. (1,013 cases) *Schramsberg Vineyards, Calistoga, CA*



90 | Iron Horse \$40

2009 Green Valley of Russian River Valley Wedding Cuvée

Based on the estate's fruit-forward lots of pinot noir, this includes some higher-acid chardonnay to focus it. The red flavors of strawberries and cassis are sweetly ripe, but the wine itself is not sweet, balanced by leanness, finishing on fruit. (2,250 cases) *Iron Horse Vineyards, Sebastopol, CA*

90 | Schramsberg \$200

1997 California J. Schram Late Disgorged

Schramsberg's 150th Anniversary Release, this ambitious sparkler has gained creaminess with age. Its firm structure presents sour cherry and toasted wheat flavors. A hint of sulfur shows at the beginning and the end, but overall it's fresh and refreshing. (*W&S* 4/13; 147 cases) *Schramsberg Vineyards, Calistoga, CA*

87 | Piper Sonoma \$14

Sonoma County Brut Rosé (Best Buy)

Snappy acidity enlivens the gentle, creamy texture of this well-made sparkler. It finishes on clean, spicy red fruit flavors. Fried smelt with lemon would match its friskiness. *Piper Sonoma, Hopland, CA*

NEW YORK



90 | Chateau Frank \$21

Finger Lakes Célèbre Riesling Crémant (Best Buy)

Brisk, lemony and thoroughly refreshing, this sparkler's ripe pear flavors and mild pear-skin finish would merit a pairing with miso-glazed chicken. It's also an irresistible aperitif. *Konstantin D. Frank & Sons, Hammondsport, NY*

NORTH CAROLINA

89 | Biltmore Estate \$25

North Carolina Blanc de Blancs (Best Buy)

Leesy and bright with a leafy top note, this chardonnay-based sparkler's ripe apple flavors have a creamy texture, which has the firmness to pair with grilled calamari. (1,200 cases) *Biltmore Estate Wine Co., Asheville, NC*

OREGON

90 | Wetzel Estate \$30

2011 Willamette Valley Rosé

Heady and rich, this pale rosé has a fine mousse directing scents of golden apple and white cherry. Its creamy, concentrated flavors have enough acidity to keep the wine on point for lobster thermidor. (*W&S* 6/13; 310 cases) *Chateau Bianca, Dallas, OR* ■