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Food and drink

25 of 2021's best sparkling wines under £40, from £10 cava to champagne and English fizz

£10 bargains, splash-out champagnes, food-friendly bottles and fine English bubbles make the list for a season of joyful sipping

By Susy Atkins

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For the sheer joy of the ritual, nothing in the world of wine beats opening a bottle of fizz. The unwinding of the wire cage, the pop of the cork (which should be a controlled, hushed "phssst", not a bang), the sound of foaming liquid poured into a tall flute, then the sight of the bubbles streaming back up to the top and blinking in the froth. It's a very special joy.

Of course, actually drinking your sparkling wine should be even more delightful. Good balance is essential: there must be refreshing acidity but it should be tamed by just the right touch of sweetness.

And there must be delicious fruity flavours in even the cheapest bubbly, while in a bottle-aged champagne or sparkling wine you should expect to find extra complexity and appeal from the interaction with yeast, giving rise to bready, biscuity, creamy hints.

The 25 bottles here have all these attributes and more. I've chosen 10 great-value bubbles (note, not all of them are inexpensive – the point is that all punch well above their price point, which can be pretty steep in the case of premium sparklers); then I've got five wines that are especially suited to matching with food, and 10 to splash out on when you feel like a special treat.

No apologies for including only one prosecco and far more crémants: premium sparkling wines made using the traditional bottle-age champagne method, but outside of the Champagne region. The quality of crémants available today is just much higher than it is for most proseccos, which are simply made in tanks and bottled young.

Spain's cava (also made in the traditional method) shouldn't be overlooked for a moment, and the sheer number of English sparklers on this list is testament to the admirable recent success of the country's winemakers. I've covered all bases, from bone-dry to super-sweet, so there is something here for everyone to have a sparkling rest of the summer.

Sweet or dry?

It's important to know when buying whether a sparkling wine is dry, medium or sweet. Unfortunately the terms on a label that are supposed to tell us this information are not easy to understand. Here are the categories for champagne and cava; other sparklers including prosecco follow the same terms. Bear in mind that 4g of sugar is approximately one teaspoonful and the amounts given are per litre, not per bottle:

- **Brut Nature:** contains 0g-3g of sugar, so exceptionally dry
- **Extra Brut:** contains 0g-6g, also very dry
- **Brut:** this is by far the biggest category of champagne or sparkling wine, but wines labelled "Brut" can contain anything from 0g to 12g. At the maximum of 12g, the wines can taste slightly off-dry, so if you want to make sure you are buying a very dry style, perhaps choose a Brut Nature or Extra Brut instead. Many bruts, though, hit the "Goldilocks" button as aperitifs and for matching with light savoury food – they're just right.
- **Extra Dry/Extra Sec/Extra Seco:** a category that causes much confusion as it means a wine that is somewhat sweeter than Brut, containing between 12g and 17g of sugar per litre, so medium-dry
- **Dry/Sec/Seco:** not really very dry, in fact, at between 17g and 32g. Medium sweet
- **Demi-sec/seco:** decidedly on the medium-sweet side, at 32g-50g
- **Doux/dulce:** properly sweet at 50g+ and best enjoyed with desserts

Spotlight on English wine

There is now widespread recognition that English sparkling wine made using the traditional champagne method can rank among the best in the world. It regularly wins top awards in international competitions, and wine lovers here have taken it to their hearts, with many discovering their local vineyards during lockdowns, or by visiting on UK holidays.

Almost all the best examples are made from one or more of the classic champagne grapes – chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier – grown in English vineyards and long aged after the second fermentation in the bottle.

These fine fizzes have made a huge impression in recent tastings; our cooler climate allowing for a tingling acidity, delicate notes of flowers, orchard fruit and citrus, and richer depths of biscuit, bread, cream and yogurt.

The blanc de blancs style – made entirely from white grapes, usually chardonnay – is especially exciting and, for me, represents the best of the English sparklers.

As well as the specific wines recommended below, do check out the sparklers from Kent's [Gusbourne Estate](#), [Jenkyn Place](#) in Hampshire, [Camel Valley](#) in Cornwall, [Furleigh Estate](#) and [Bride Valley](#) in Dorset, [Sharpham](#) in Devon, and [Ashling Park](#), [Hoffmann & Rathbone](#), [Nyetimber](#), [Rathfinny](#) and [Wiston](#), all in Sussex.

10 bargain bubbles

Waitrose No.1 Castillo Perelada Cava Brut NV

Spain (11.5%, [Waitrose](#) , £10.79)

Lean and dry cava, gleaming pale gold, with green apple peel flavour and a lightly yeasty finish. Made by Waitrose in collaboration with the Castillo Perelada bodega near Girona, it's on a tempting special offer – but only until Tuesday.

Specially Selected Crémant du Jura 2018

France (11.5%, [Aldi](#) , £8.49)

There's a streak of orange and a toasty note to this 100 per cent chardonnay sparkler from eastern France. Consistently one of the best bubbles on the high street for under a tenner and in a smart looking bottle, too.

Etoile de Timberlay Crémant de Bordeaux Brut Rosé NV

France (12%, [M&S](#) , £9)

If you like your rosé (still or sparkling) very dry, then you'll love this: it's snappy and even white-peppery, but sings out with red cherries and redcurrants too and isn't the least bit sour. A mouth-watering aperitif.

Taste the Difference Prosecco Rosé 2020

Veneto, Italy (11%, [Sainsbury's](#) , £10)

Pink prosecco (a blend of the usual white glera grapes with pinot nero/pinot noir) has been allowed for over a year now, and although I don't like every example by any means, a few stand out, such as this light and elegant, strawberry-laced one, well-balanced and not too sweet.

Tanners Cava Brut NV

Spain (12%, [Tanners](#) , £10.95)

When cava is as good as this, it makes me wonder why we don't appreciate it more. Traditional method fizz made from local Spanish grapes by the [Segura Viudas winery](#) for a mouthwatering mix of Granny Smiths and lemon zest, with a little toastiness from bottle ageing.

Domaine des Hauts Perrays Crémant de Loire Brut NV

France (12.5%, [Lea & Sandeman](#) , £14.50 or £13.50 as part of a six)

Top quality crémant made mainly from chenin blanc, delivering crunchy apple and lime zest, mineral-fresh, pure and clean. It's a fine aperitif on a summer's evening and gives many "bargain" champagnes a run for their money.

Castelveder Franciacorta Brut NV

Italy (12.5%, [Majestic](#) , £19.99 or £17.99 as part of mixed six)

Franciacorta wines, made in Lombardy, are Italy's version of champagne, bottle aged (unlike prosecco) and consistently high quality. This is a keenly priced example, rich with a light caramel note and apple pie flavour, although finishing dry.

The Best English Sparkling Brut 2010 Grand Vintage Brut

(11.5%, [Morrisons](#) , £18, currently on offer for £16)

It's not a misprint; this English sparkler is over 10 years old. Still vivacious and bright, with crisp apples and citrus, its rounded and buttery layer reveals relative maturity. An extraordinary bargain, it has won gold in the [Decanter World Wine Awards 2021](#).

Finest English Sparkling Rosé Brut NV

Kent (11.5%, [Tesco](#) , £21)

Any English fizz of this quality, priced at around £20, is a bargain. Made by the Hush Heath winery for Tesco, it's got a distinctive flavour and scent of wild strawberries, with fresh red cherries thrown in, and a crisp sherbety acidity lifting the finish. Good as a palate refresher.

Ferrari Maximum Brut Blanc de Blancs NV

Italy (12.5%, [Vivino](#) , £26)

The reason this champagne is in the "good value" section is because it's exactly that – a remarkable price tag for a hugely satisfying 10-year-old blanc de blancs that yields delicious apple depths under a quilt of biscuit and citron.

5 bottles that are good for food

Extra Special Asti NV

Italy (7%, [Asda](#) , £7)

Properly sweet fizz from north-west Italy, relatively low in alcohol and wonderfully inexpensive. It has the scent and flavour of ripe pears and green grapes dipped in icing sugar; chill it well to match fresh fruit, meringues and cream cakes.

Jansz Premium Rosé NV

Tasmania, Australia (12%, [Wine Direct](#) , £19.50)

With its satin-like soft mousse and scented strawberry quality, this gorgeous wine from cool-climate Tazzy (arguably Australia's best region for fizz) is a real hit with seafood, especially prawns, and smoked salmon. Pinot noir is dominant in the blend.

Graham Beck Blanc de Blancs Brut 2016

Robertson, South Africa (12.5%, [Vinvm](#) , £17.50)

A premium example of "Cap Classique", fizz made in the champagne method in South Africa. It carries a luxurious rich creaminess poured over lemon-meringue pie flavour and is best with food, ideally savoury pastry canapés.

Leckford Estate Brut 2016

Hampshire, England (12%, [Waitrose](#) , £14.99)

Made with grapes grown on Waitrose's own estate in Hampshire, a wonderfully crisp, refreshing wine with yellow apple, light apricot and Chantilly cream dancing on the palate. A wonderful choice for seafood, especially oysters and fruits de mer. Note the offer.

L'Intact Pet Nat, Yves Duport

France, (12.5%, [Le Social](#) , £24)

Pet nats are wines that are bottled before they have finished their fermentation, so bubbles are simply captured in the wine. Here's one which has been farmed organically and biodynamically-and has a very fresh and fruit-forward taste. Think dry, fruity red berries and crunchy cranberries, shouting out "picnic" and ready to match cold meats and pastries.

10 splash-out sparklers

Domaine Bersan Crémant de Bourgogne Blanc de Noirs NV

France (13%, [Bancroft Wines](#) , £24.49)

More expensive than most crémants, but this is one of the best I've ever found. Ripe and quite full-bodied, with a creamy, fresh yogurt layer of richness.

Barone Pizzini Animante Extra Brut NV

Lombardy, Italy (12%, [Vintage Roots](#) , £26)

Bone-dry example of Franciacorta made in Brescia, Lombardy, in the champagne method from organic grapes, mainly chardonnay and pinot noir, with a smattering of ancient grape erbamat. It has a soft mousse with tiny bubbles, grapefruit and oranges.

Les Pionniers Vintage Champagne 2012

France (12%, [Co-op](#) , £26.99)

The non-vintage Les Pionniers is superb at just £19, but the vintage version is more elegant and complex, with masses of tiny bubbles, a lemon streak and hint of almonds. It's a badly kept "secret" that it's made by the famous Champagne house Piper-Heidsieck for the Co-op.

Langham Estate Culver Classic Cuvée NV

Dorset, England (12%, [Langham Wine](#) , £27.50)

Beautifully crafted Dorset fizz, 55 per cent pinot noir, which shows in the raspberry aroma, and layers of red apple and black cherry ice cream. Tiny satin-like bubbles and crisp acidity on the finish. And for such quality, £27.50 is actually very good value.

Hattingley Valley 'Team GB' Classic Reserve NV

Hampshire, England (12%, [Hattingley Valley](#) , £30)

This limited edition of Hattingley's excellent Classic Reserve is in a special bottle created for the Olympics, with £2.50 from each bottle sold going to Team GB. With its lively citrus, and nuances of light biscuit and freshly baked bread, it's a racy winner.

Harrow & Hope Blanc de Blancs Brut 2015

Buckingham, England (12%, [Vivino](#) , £39.67)

Stellar English sparkler made from chardonnay grown on flint and chalk-rich slopes in the Chilterns. Fresh orange, turning marmaladey, digestive biscuit and a honeyed toast mingle. Very little is left of this vintage – snap it up!

The Society's Champagne Brut NV

France (12.5%, [The Wine Society](#) , £34)

A “private cuvée” created by the champagne house Alfred Gratien for The Wine Society and a beautifully balanced drop, rich gold in hue, crisp but with a light spoonful of vanilla ice cream along with fresh citrus. Destined to give lots of pleasure at this season's celebrations.

Berry Bros & Rudd Champagne Grand Cru Brut by Mailly

France (12%, [Berry Bros & Rudd](#) , £32)

Wonderful, elegant cuvée made with fruit from the Grand Cru village of Mailly, 75 per cent pinot noir and 25 per cent chardonnay. It makes me think of freshly baked apple tart, with vanilla and cream, and a little dab of salt at the very end.

Champagne Taittinger Nocturne Sec NV

France (12.5%, [Waitrose Cellar](#) , and selected branches of [Waitrose](#), £45)

This will please those who don't like their Champagne too dry – it's a “sec” with twice the sweetness of Taittinger's Brut, though the effect is subtle, revealing a touch of honey over fresh peachy fruit.

Exton Park Reserve Blend RB/32 Brut NV

Hampshire (11.5%, [Selfridges](#) , £39.99)

Corinne Seely of single-estate Exton Park is a seriously talented winemaker and here she has used 32 reserve wines in the blend with younger wine to create a complex sparkler. Look out for delicious layers of baked apple, brioche, sweet pastry and softer pear with a lifted, clean finish.

Bubbles without booze

For those seeking a non-alcoholic sparkler, try Belle & Co's good-value rosé, in Asda (£3.50) or white, in Morrisons at £3.50. More expensive, but appealing in their relatively dry, balanced style, is the [Liberated From Alcohol](#) range from Sweden's Oddbird, which includes French and Italian sparklers, now newly in the UK and available from [31Dover](#), [The Alcohol Free Co.](#) and Amazon from £8.99.