



## STAFF TRAINING MODULE

# *Champagne*

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The Champagne AOC in northern France produces the world's most famous sparkling wine. The word itself—Champagne—has become synonymous with sparkling wine, but true Champagne may only be produced in the small region of the same name in northern France. Sparkling winemaking in Champagne dates to the 1700s.



## The Region

Champagne AOC is located along the 48th parallel, near the world's northerly limit for viticulture. The region's cool climate promotes high acidity in grapes, an asset in the production of sparkling wine.

The vineyards of Champagne are planted on chalky soils, which retain heat and provide excellent water regulation for the vine. Below the ground, a large natural cave network provides perfect storage conditions for the cellaring of wine.

### *Champagne is divided into five main areas*

**Montagne de Reims:** Champagne's northernmost region, situated around the city of Reims is the premier region for Pinot Noir.

**Vallée de la Marne:** The Marne Valley surrounds the Marne River, and includes the town of Epernay. Meunier is the favored grape of the region.

**Côte des Blancs:** The best region in Champagne for Chardonnay grapes.

### *Côte de Sézanne*

### *The Aube (Côte des Bars)*

In addition, wine-producing villages in Champagne are classified as grand cru, premier cru, or simply cru. In Burgundy, single vineyards attain the rank of premier or grand cru; in Champagne, entire villages achieve status. The 17 Grand Cru villages are held in the highest regard, and are located in the Montagne de Reims, Vallée de la Marne, and Côte des Blancs. If a producer makes a wine using only grand cru or premier cru fruit, he may use these terms on the bottle's label.

## The Wine

Champagne gets its sparkle from a second fermentation in the bottle. A still base wine is bottled with a small amount of **liqueur de tirage**: a mixture of wine, sugar, and yeast. This causes a second fermentation, and the carbon dioxide produced by yeasts converting sugar to alcohol is trapped inside the bottle.

As the yeasts die, they form sediment (lees) inside the bottle. Over time, the presence of lees in the wine contributes pleasant acacia, bakeshop and croissant aromas. Producers will age their better Champagne bottlings on the lees for a period of years.

Part of Champagne's appeal is visual, so producers "disgorge" the wines prior to sale. In this process, the lees, which would create cloudiness in the final wine, are removed from the bottle. A small amount of "dosage", a liquid mixture of sugar and wine, is often added for balance or outright sweetness.







## *The major grapes of Champagne*

The Champagne region's two most planted grapes, Pinot Noir and Meunier, are red varieties, yet they usually produce white sparkling wines. The clear juice is pressed off the skins before any color can be imparted to the wine.

### *Pinot Noir*

Pinot Noir provides structure, weight, and power in the wines of Champagne.

### *Meunier (Pinot Meunier)*

"Miller's Pinot," so named for its characteristic speckled appearance—as though the grapes leaves have been dusted with flour—contributes attractive fruitiness and youthful accessibility to the wine. Many non-vintage cuvées contain a significant proportion of Meunier.

### *Chardonnay*

Champagne's longest-lived wines are often based on Chardonnay. The grape tends to produce chiseled, austere, and/or elegant styles of wine.



## *Sweetness*

The final sweetness level of Champagne is determined by the "dosage", an addition of liquid sugar and wine occurring after disgorgement. Most styles are "Brut," or dry in style.

In order from driest to sweetest, the indicators are:

### *Brut Nature/Brut Zero*

Absolutely bone-dry, with no added dosage.

### *Extra Brut*

Nearly bone-dry, with little to no dosage.

### *Brut*

This category ranges from bone dry to wines with a little residual sugar, depending on the house style.

### *Extra Sec/Extra Dry*

Although the category is "extra dry", the wines are really off-dry.

### *Sec/Dry*

Wines labeled "dry" are actually off-dry to semi-sweet.

### *Demi-Sec*

"Half-dry" Champagne suitable for many dessert courses. Medium sweet.

### *Doux*

A rarely produced dessert-sweet Champagne style.