

Break Out the Bubbly

By Kevin Fritz

Champagne, Asti and sparkling wine aren't just for New Year's Eve.

It's the devil's wine. That's how people centuries ago described wine that had an effervescence quality, which was created by accident using a secondary fermentation process. In those days, glass bottles were not strong enough to contain the bubbly concoction and explosions ruined wine cellars and injured numerous winemakers. But thanks to the English, the beast was finally tamed by manufacturing a much stronger glass and capping it with a cork. The love affair with sparkling wine finally took off.

Sparkling wine has come a long way since its creation and today's imbibers have discovered that it's no longer just for New Year's Eve or special occasions. It's for everyday.

"You should start off every meal with sparkling wine," believes **Gary Tupper**, operations manager at the Wine Barn in **Orlando**. "It's a palate cleanser."

He says you don't have to worry about what you are serving, be it fish, chicken, red meat or a vegetarian dish. "You can pair sparkling wine with anything," he says. "It's your fall back. There is no smarter decision than a bottle of sparkling wine."

While a glass of the bubbly has become vogue, it still creates some confusion with consumers, most notably between Champagne, sparkling wine and Asti spumante.

Tupper spells it out quiet simply: "Champagne must be from the Champagne region in France. Outside of that, it is sparkling wine."

The grapes used to make Champagne are the dark pinot noir and pinot meunier, and the white chardonnay, creating styles ranging from dry (Extra Brut) to sweet (Doux), the latter of which is usually served as a dessert wine. Most Champagne is non-vintage, meaning it is a blend of grapes from different years; vintage Champagne is produced with grapes all grown in the same year. Tupper says Champagne made from chardonnay grapes is called Blanc de Blancs (white of whites), while Blanc de Noirs (white of blacks) is produced from the black grapes, which gives it a slightly darker color.

According to *The Ultimate Bar Book*, Champagne ought to be used exclusively when creating a Champagne cocktail—like a mimosa—

and only minimal amounts of other ingredients should be added.

As far as Asti spumante goes, Asti is a town in Italy's Piedmont region historically known for bottling a sparkling wine using the Muscato grape; spumante is what Italians refer to as sparkling wine. The term Asti spumante has become a generic term over time, referring to Italian sparkling wine that is sweeter and lighter than Champagne. Even sweeter is the popular Muscato d'Asti, which was created in the 16th century.

Tupper says one of the hottest sparkling wines on the market today is an Italian sparkling wine named Flor Prosecco, co-crafted by world-renowned chef **Mario Batali** and the Bastianich winery.

"There is a perception that it is sweet, but it's not," he says, noting it's priced reasonably at \$14.99. **L**

For more sparkling wines, visit CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.

