

A Short Discussion on Champagne

Written by Terry Connor

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Name the occasion, any occasion that calls for a celebration, and you may hear someone in the background say, "This calls for a bottle of Champagne." We as a human race have adopted champagne to accompany the marking of special events such as a wedding, a new born, the landing of a new job, or the buying of a new house. Now we find ourselves in June, which means some of us will attend at least one wedding.

Champagne comes to us compliments of the French region of Rheims. The wine that is produced in this delimited area, with the intention of having it become champagne, can be called "Champagne." Wine produced under the same conditions (Method Champenoise) anywhere else in the world must be called "Sparkling Wine." This is a demand placed upon the world of wine by the French, and the French Producers have found worldwide cooperation. The French Producers have had tremendous success with their Champagnes. Can success be found anywhere else on planet earth? The answer is yes; allow me to introduce a star from California called SCHRAMSBERG.

The year was 1862 and Jacob Schram purchased a large piece of land on a mountainside in Napa. Jacob had emigrated from Germany and it was his dream to produce wine as his family had done in Germany. From there on it was old fashion hard work – clearing land, planting vines, and digging caves for storage and aging. Evidently it paid off. Before long Jacob was producing 12,000 cases of award winning wine per year. Shipments of the wine were destined for ports on a worldwide scale. A highlight occurred in 1891 when the Schramsberg Riesling was served to President William Harrison at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

Sadly Mr. Schram passed away in 1905. The winery operations were assumed by his son Herman. This was not a successful succession, as the winery ceased operating and was sold in 1912.

As an aside, Author Robert Louis Stevenson authored a book in 1883 called "The Silverado Squatters." Stevenson was interested in all types of wine and enjoyed the opportunity to write about them. In his text he writes of the many adventurous folks experimenting with wine growing in the Napa Valley and how Mr. Schram, being one of those folks, was so successful. On one occasion he relates to us how excited he was to have an opportunity to taste Mr. Schram's wines. He descended into the caves with Mr. Schram and proceeded to taste 18 different wines. At the same time, he left his new wife on the front porch with Mrs. Schram. When he ascended from the caves I am sure words, or maybe just a few stares, were exchanged. In any case the Book survives to this day. It is available in paperback and from the Winery.

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It is difficult at best to ignore as valuable a piece of property such as the Schramsberg estate. Jack and Jamie Davies acquired the estate in 1965 and brought it back to life. Their first product was a Sparkling Wine from 100% Chardonnay. It used the traditional METHOD CHAMPENOISE style of winemaking. Two years later Schramsberg produced a dated vintage Blanc de Noirs from Pinot Noir Grapes using the same style of winemaking.

The important thing to remember here is that Jack and Jamie put the winery back on a solid foundation. It was now in regular production and experimenting with new products, the majority being Sparkling Wines. At last count there were eleven sparkling wines, a Pinot Noir and a Cabernet Sauvignon. A close examination of the product list shows that the wines are all competitively priced as compared to other premium wines. These wines are available in the Lowcountry.

Quality is the name of the game and Schramsberg stands out. The winery has received numerous awards and recognition. None stand out more than the list of White House and Official Events where Schramsberg Sparkling Wine was served at luncheons or State Dinners under eight United States Presidents and First Ladies. The list of VIPs served is huge; allow me to mention just a few: Chancellor Angela Merkel, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, Mikhail Gorbachev, Pope John-Paul, the King and Queen of Sweden, Members of Congress, and the Special Olympics Sponsors. The list goes on and on and is proudly published by the Winery.

At any given time, there are as many as 2.7 million bottles of wine stored in, the cave you see here, for aging two to ten years before release.

Let's look at couple of wines. The first is Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs. This is the flagship wine made from 100% Chardonnay. Serve with or without food. \$34. (This wine was served in Beijing when President Nixon gave his famous "Toast to Peace." In 1972 with Chou En-Lai.) The second wine is the Blanc de Noirs. Made from 100% Pinot Noir. It pairs well with lighter fare such as smoked fish or mushroom risotto. \$40.

WINESPEAK. A bit more on the wine grapes. The Chardonnay grapes will produce a golden color champagne. The Pinot Noir grapes will also produce a golden color champagne because the juice and pulp of red-skinned grapes is white. The Champagne houses do not produce Blanc de Noir nearly as much as the California makers of Sparkling wine.