

HERE COMES THE *Wine*



By Tina Caputo

Top: Domaine Carneros terrace. – Photo provided by Domaine Carneros.
Left: Iron Horse Wedding Cuvee. – Photo provided by Iron Horse Vineyards.
Right: Breathless Wines in Healdsburg. – Photo provided by Breathless Wines.

When the summer wedding season arrives in the North Bay, a bride-to-be's thoughts turn to more than just love and billowy white dresses. If a towering cake is the iconic food of weddings, sparkling wine is its liquid equivalent. What could be more festive than a gorgeous glass of dancing bubbles?

While most people know that bubbly is a must-have for weddings, there is still some confusion about the logistics. Which sparkler should you choose? How much will you need? How and when should the wine be served?

To help clear up the mystery, we asked three local sparkling wine producers for advice: Eileen Crane, founding CEO and winemaker at Domaine Carneros in Napa; Joy Sterling, partner and CEO at Iron Horse Vineyards in Sebastopol; and Rebecca Faust, co-founder of Breathless Wines in Healdsburg.

A Matter of Style

When choosing a sparkling wine for any occasion – wedding or otherwise – it helps to know a bit about the house style and flagship offerings of the different producers.

The most popular sparklers at Domaine Carneros are Le Rêve, a luxury cuvée made from Chardonnay grapes; Brut Rosé and Brut Vintage. As an estate winery, Domaine Carneros grows most of its own grapes, mainly in the Carneros region.

The winery is owned by the family behind Champagne Taittinger in France, and the company's French Champagnes and California sparklers have a similarly elegant style. (By law, only wines made in the Champagne region can use that name on their labels.)

"When you think of Domaine Carneros," Crane said, "think of Audrey Hepburn in a little black dress – everything in place, nothing extra, but still kinky and fun."

At Iron Horse, the top-selling bubbly is the Wedding Cuvée, a pale, dry rosé; and the Vintage Brut. All of the winery's sparklers are made with estate-grown grapes, and vintage dated.

"Our style sends off memory bells that say 'Champagne' in terms of the finesse, but the fruit is unmistakably California, Sonoma County, Russian River, Green Valley and most specifically, Iron Horse," Sterling said.

Breathless produces three sparklers: Brut, Blanc de Noirs and Brut Rosé, made from grapes grown in Sonoma-Carneros, Mendocino County and Dry Creek Valley. The winery's flagship wine is the Blanc de Noirs. "It won



Eileen Crane, founding CEO and winemaker at Domaine Carneros.
Photo provided by Domaine Carneros.



Joy Sterling, partner and CEO at Iron Horse Vineyards in Sebastopol.
– Photo provided by Iron Horse Vineyards.



Rebecca Faust, co-founder of Breathless Wines in Healdsburg.
Photo provided by Breathless Wines.

our first award at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair, and continues to win," Faust said.

Breathless winemaker Penny Gadd-Coster describes the house style as "elegant, showing the fruit in its best light, but without being overly fruity." In short, she said, "It's traditional French with a California twist."

Ultimately, when deciding which wine to choose for a wedding, Crane said, "Don't listen to your caterer. When I talk to caterers they will say, 'I always recommend the cheapest because nobody will drink it. And I think if you (serve) the cheapest, you're absolutely right.'"

The Right Glass

Once you've selected your wines, you'll need the right glassware.

"I'm not fussy, but there is no doubt that the shape of the glass makes a difference in how the wine tastes," Sterling said. "A flute has the advantage of retaining the bubbles, while a wider glass tends to make the sparkling wine taste older."

Crane prefers a tulip-shaped Champagne glass. "There are some exquisite glasses that allow you to see the bubbles rising," she said. "Having the bubbles rise is so evocative and beautiful."

Almost more important than the glass shape, she added, is the amount of wine poured into it. "I think one of the mistakes people make is they try to fill a glass three-quarters full, or even more. That gives the wine a chance to warm up, and warm bubbles are not what I want. For me, a third of a glass is about right."

Serving temperature is also a factor for Faust. "Sparkling wine should be served very cold," she said. "If the wine is not cold enough, it could gush, and you can lose the wonderful effervescence that makes a bubbly so special. For large events, always have a back-up ice chest with cold wine ready to replace the wines being poured from the table."

In terms of how much to buy, Sterling added, "I always figure 50 glasses to a case."

Sparkling with Everything

When serving sparkling wine at a wedding, Crane advised, don't save it for the cake. "The most celebratory moment is really just as the reception is getting started," she said. "That's when you should serve sparkling wine, at the beginning of the meal. Frankly, with cake, you should be serving coffee – for responsible hospitality." >>



Iron Horse Wedding Cuvée on ice.
 – Photo provided by Iron Horse Vineyards.

Sparkling wine also pairs well with a wide variety of dishes, and can be served throughout the meal. “I find it really fun to serve with beef dishes, because that always surprises people,” Crane said. “Sparkling wine is so refreshing, it’s a different kind of offset to the richness of the beef.”

Sterling recommends sparkling wine with everything from potato chips to sushi to fried chicken. “Wedding Cuvée and dark, bittersweet chocolate is about all you really need,” she said. “I also like our Brut Rosé with steak.”

Faust seconds the potato chip recommendation, topped with a dollop of crème fraiche and a sprinkling of caviar – a favorite of Breathless’ winemaker. “It just goes with happy moments, every time.”

About Our Experts

Eileen Crane began her wine career in 1978, as a tour guide at Domaine Chandon, and went on to become

assistant winemaker. In 1984 she joined Gloria Ferrer Champagne Caves as wine maker and vice president. Three years later, the Taittinger family recruited her to oversee the development of Domaine Carneros as managing director and winemaker.

Joy Sterling grew up in Paris, where she learned to appreciate culinary pleasures at an early age. Her parents founded Iron Horse in 1979, but Sterling didn’t join the family business until 1985, after working as deputy bureau chief for ABC Network News in Los Angeles. She became the winery’s CEO in 2006.

Rebecca Faust fell in love with wine while working for financial consulting firm Deloitte & Touche. She later became the financial controller at Piper Sonoma, and then the CFO at Lambert Bridge Winery. Faust co-founded the Rack & Riddle custom-crush winery in 2007, and in 2012, co-founded Breathless Wines with her sisters, Cynthia Faust and Sharon Cohn. ■



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RECOMMENDED *Sparkling Wines*



**Domaine Carneros
2010 Vermeil Demi-Sec,
Carneros (\$37):**

This lightly-sweet sparkler has lively, fine bubbles, a golden color and floral aromas. Elegant and understated, the wine has flavors of peaches and melon, with notes of lemon peel.



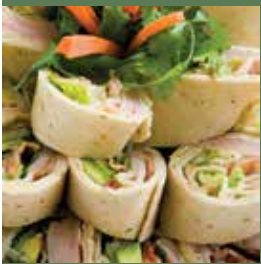
**Breathless Blanc
de Noirs NV,
North Coast (\$30):**

This 100% Pinot Noir bubbly is crisp and dry, with a pretty pale pink hue, perky bubbles and red berry flavors.



**Iron Horse 2011
Wedding Cuvee,
Green Valley (\$44):**

Created for Joy Sterling's wedding, this rosé sparkler has a gorgeous pale pink color, aromas of fresh strawberries and tangerines, and berry and citrus flavors.



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United

Based in San Rafael and San Anselmo, we serve individuals, families, and businesses throughout Marin. Locally Grown and family owned, United Delicatessen offers a large selection of gourmet food choices, arranged and freshly prepared for your enjoyment. All of our recipes are made from the same great ingredients you can find in our stores.

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