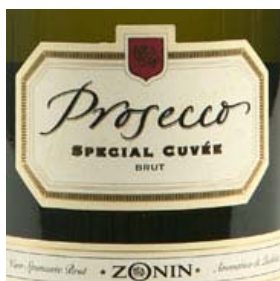




Top 5 Wedding Sparklers

Nearly every wedding has a celebratory Champagne toast, but the sparkler doesn't *have* to come from France—or break your budget
By Linda Murphy

Please note that wine prices may differ depending on where you live and whether you purchase in bulk. Not all caterers or event spaces allow brides and grooms (or their wedding planners) to choose wine, so check before you purchase.



Zonin Prosecco Special Cuvée Brut, Veneto, Italy

(about \$11)

Italian Prosecco is the ideal low-cost sparkling wine for weddings (though pricey versions are available too). Unlike Champagne, which gets its carbonation from a labor-intensive method that requires a second fermentation in the bottle, Prosecco's fizz comes from fermentation in pressurized tanks. It's a less costly process used by the vast majority of producers, and the quality of the resulting product can be very high, as it is with Zonin's Special Cuvée. This wine has floral aromas; lively effervescence; crisp apple, citrus, and almond flavors; and a creamy richness often missing in comparably priced Prosecco. The word "brut" on the label signifies that the wine is not sweet; sweeter versions of Prosecco are labeled "extra dry" (slightly sweet) and "dry" (much sweeter). The only thing sweet about Zonin Special Cuvée is its price.

Elegant Hors 'd'Oeuvre Pairing:	Elegant Main Course Pairing:
Spanakopita There's an exhilarating texture contrast with the gooey spinach-Feta filling and flaky phyllo pockets taking on the wine's creaminess and carbonation.	Parmesan-Crusted Chicken and Asparagus Prosecco is assertive enough to match the crunchiness of the Parmesan-panko crust, and the wine's acidity slices through the buttery sauce on the asparagus.



Greg Norman Estates Sparkling Pinot Noir/Chardonnay, South Eastern Australia

(about \$15)

What does Australian pro golfer Greg Norman know about bubbly? Enough to oversee production of this Aussie sparkler, made in the traditional Champagne method from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. It tastes twice as expensive as its price, with a frothy head; fine bubbles; complex citrus, red berry, yellow stone fruit, and biscuit notes; and a silky richness. The red-grape Pinot Noir dominates the blend. Norman launched his brand in 1999, making Chardonnay, Shiraz, and this sparkling wine from grapes grown in South Eastern Australia. A range of California varietals followed. The wines in both lines are excellent values and hearty party pours.

Elegant Hors 'd'Oeuvre Pairing:	Elegant Main Course Pairing:
Crab-and-Pork Spring Rolls The wine has a sweet fruitiness that's compatible with the strong flavors of ginger, cilantro, and the chile-laced dipping sauce.	Seared Scallops with Tomato Beurre Blanc The sweetness of the shellfish is heightened by the wine's acidity; there are no tannins, toasty oak, or high alcohol to interfere with the scallop's natural flavors.



Segura Viudas Reserva Heredad, Catalonia, Spain

(about \$20)

Don't overlook Spanish sparkling wine, called cava, for the wedding toast. The best come from the Penedes region near Barcelona and are produced via the *méthode traditionnelle*, a process in which bubbles form in the bottle. Segura Viudas's nonvintage Reserva Heredad, made from Macabeo and Parellada grapes, is remarkably complex for its price, with white-flower and yeast aromas and refreshing flavors of citrus, brioche, and minerals. The striking bottle—decorated with a metallic base and coat of arms—looks expensive, yet it's a great buy for brides and grooms seeking inexpensive sophistication.

Elegant Hors 'd'Oeuvre Pairing:	Elegant Main Course Pairing:
Oysters Rockefeller Cava caresses the briny, salty flavor without suffocating the oyster essence, and the bread-crumb topping mirrors the baked-bread note in the wine.	Roast Chicken with Mustard-Thyme Sauce and Green Salad with Olives The wine's acidity and bubbles cut through the sauce and mirror the tartness of the salad's vinaigrette.



Iron Horse 2005 Wedding Cuvee, Green Valley of Russian River Valley, California

(about \$37)

Cynics might say putting "Wedding Cuvee" on a sparkling wine label is a marketing ploy to sell to the soon-to-be-betrothed. In the case of Iron Horse Vineyards in Sonoma County, one of California's most accomplished bubbly producers, it's no gimmick. This rich yet structured sparkler, made mostly from Pinot Noir grapes with a bit of Chardonnay, is indeed ideal for the big day. It has the staying power to go from first toast through pork roast, with classic aromas of bread dough, melon, and green apple, as well as juicy apple, strawberry, and Meyer lemon flavors. The finish is remarkably creamy yet remains refreshing. While many bubbly are produced from grapes grown in multiple years, this one is a "vintage" wine, meaning all the grapes were grown in 2005—a very good year for Pinot Noir in the Russian River Valley.

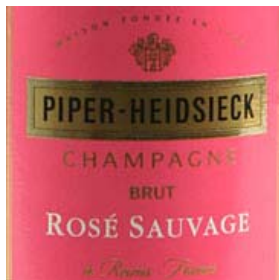
Elegant Hors 'd'Oeuvre Pairing:	Elegant Main Course Pairing:

[Roasted Potatoes with Caviar and Smoked Salmon](#)

The wine has the acidity to handle the salty caviar; its lemony note is a bridge to the preserved lemon peel in the dish.

[Scallion Wild Rice Crepes with Mushroom Filling](#)

Pinot Noir–based wines like this one have a natural affinity for earthy mushrooms and wild rice; the zesty red-pepper sauce needs a wine with similar piquancy.



Piper-Heidsieck Sauvage Rosé, Champagne, France

(about \$50)

Rosé sparkling wines are all the rage these days, so why not show some sophistication by serving a rosé from the Champagne region? Because of their popularity and limited production, rosé Champagnes can be expensive—hundreds of dollars per bottle—yet Piper-Heidsieck's version is a relative bargain. With its deep pink color and crisp strawberry, citrus, and spice flavors, it's perfectly festive for receptions and toasts but also substantial enough to serve throughout the meal, especially with salmon, poultry, and light red meat dishes.

Elegant Hors 'd'Oeuvre Pairing:

[Dilled Salmon Tartare on Whole Grain Bread](#)

The bubbly's brisk acidity counterbalances the richness of the salmon and the mustard/mayonnaise spread. The color mirrors the pink-fleshed salmon.

Elegant Main Course Pairing:

[Duck Breast with Roasted Peaches](#)

The wine's effervescence functions as a palate scrubber for the fatty duck; its depth of flavor complements the gaminess of the bird.



Sonoma County wine writer Linda Murphy, the West Coast correspondent for Decanter magazine and jancisrobinson.com, is the former wine editor at The San Francisco Chronicle and the former managing editor of WineToday.com, The New York Times's wine Web site.