

La crème des crémants

Sparkling wines from all over France were put through their paces last month by a panel of expert independents. Crémant is a style with huge potential for specialist merchants, with styles to suit just about every taste

SPARKLING WINE IS booming in the UK, and crémant is well placed to capitalise on the consumer's love affair with bubbles.

Forty examples from 15 producers and six French regions were assembled recently in London for a tasting that demonstrated the breadth and versatility of the style.

Crémant has been made across France for generations. It's a traditional-method wine that is made in seven AOP regions: Alsace, Bordeaux, Bourgogne, Die (Rhône Valley), Jura, Limoux and the Loire.

Grapes must be hand-harvested, and pressed either as whole bunches or destemmed. There's a must limit of 100 litres for every 150kg of pressed grapes.

A second fermentation must take place in the bottle, with a maximum dosage of 50g/l in the finished wines. Finally, the wines must be aged for at least nine months on the lees for before disgorgement, and then for at least three months in the



From left: Mark Flounders, Vagabond; Arthur Verdin, The Sampler; Kenrick Bush, BoB Wines; Max Taylor and Andrew Gray, Grays & Feather

bottle before being released on to the market.

The Wine Merchant assembled small group of independent merchants to taste examples submitted from all 15 producers represented at the London tasting, organised by Business France.

THE PANEL WAS chaired by Andrew Gray of Grays & Feather, the online sparkling wine specialist, who has been named as the UK's Crémant Ambassador.

"Crémant has an impressive amount to offer," he says. He argues that crémant is "excellent as a casual drink" where still wines might otherwise have been chosen, adding that the style "also offers a world of

flavour pairings and food matches".

"The range of characters and styles is really broad," he says. "There are different crémants for different consumers and different palates.

"It's only a plus that the wines and wineries have long histories, which offer a fantastic talking point with our customers and keeps them coming back."

Kenrick Bush of BoB Wines in south London says: "My customers are starting to be more open minded now to crémant, especially with the rise in price of Prosecco."

• **Read the panel's verdict on the 15 wines they discussed together on pages 36 and 37.**

The fabulous fifteen

The panel's verdict on the featured crémants in the April tasting

Domaine Pierre et Frédérique Becht Chardonnay 2013

Another impressive Crémant d'Alsace from a long-standing family producer, made this time in a fruitier, richer style but without compromising its elegance. Warm, honeyed and spicy – perhaps with a hint of nutmeg? – this wine was suggested as a good match for white meat dishes.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.domaine-becht.com

Looking for UK representation



Domaine Zinck Crémant Brut Blanc 2013

This blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Blanc comes from a 20-hectare estate near Colmar. The judges described the wine as “warm and approachable” as well as “crisp and fresh”, with red apple, vanilla and sherbet notes. A versatile wine, in a traditional style.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.zinck.fr

Looking for UK representation



SAS Célène Black Pearl

Hailing from Entre-Deux-Mers in Bordeaux, Black Pearl is made by a producer that has specialised in sparkling wine for 70 years and seems to have perfected the art. Made from Cabernet Franc, this is bursting with flavour – orange peel, nectarines and hazelnuts are all in evidence. Quirky and original, certainly, but also well balanced and consistent, with impressive length.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.cremants-celene.com

Looking for UK representation



Caves de Bailly-Lapierre Pinot Noir

This multi award-winning producer of Crémant de Bourgogne prides itself on its lengthy ageing. This example is 100% Pinot Noir and was praised by the panel for its elegance and complexity: red and green apples, nuts and black pepper were all picked out. A well-crafted wine that works well with cheese.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.bailli-lapierre.fr

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Compagnie Vinicole de Bourgogne Levert Frères Grande Cuvée

Levert Frères is a major producer of Crémant de Bourgogne. Here we find Chardonnay and Pinot Noir blended together, and the result is intriguing – there's a smoky, white pepper character but also creamy, candy floss notes on the palate. Full-flavoured but elegant.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.primavinae.com

Looking for UK representation



Domaine Celine et Laurent Tripoz Brut Nature

This family-owned Crémant de Bourgogne producer works biodynamically and is focused on Chardonnay. This is a bit of a wild child, with a fantastically herbaceous nose and complex layers of flavours on the palate (notably grapefruit and citrus) and a pleasant smokiness. Terrific length too.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.tripoz.fr

Dudley Craig Wines (richard@dcwines.co.uk)



Domaine Veuve Ambal Grande Cuvée

Another long-established Crémant de Bourgogne producer, accounting for 40% of the AOC's volumes. This bold and rounded blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Aligoté and Gamay has a hint of salinity and chalkiness, as well as apples and brioche on the palate. A complex and unusual wine.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.veuveambal.com

Enotria&Coe (salesorders@enotriacoe.com)



Caves Jean Bourdy Crémant de Jura Blanc

This domaine has belonged to the same family for 500 years, and switched to biodynamic farming in 2005. This wine is 100% Chardonnay, with hints of marzipan and frangipane on the nose (some panelists also detected herbs and leather) and complex layers of almonds and citrus fruits on the palate.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.cavesjeanbourdy.com

Dudley Craig Wines (richard@dcwines.co.uk)



Domaine Bouvet Ladubay Excellence

This Saumur domaine was once, it is claimed, the biggest producer of sparkling wine anywhere in the world, and still produces 6 million bottles each year. This Chenin/Chardonnay blend is an approachable, easy-drinking wine, with a blend of salinity and apple flavours, that would work brilliantly with canapes.

Ex cellars: €8-€11

www.bouvet-ladubay.fr

Watermill Wines (npayne@watermillwines.co.uk)



Domäne Vincendeau Extra Brut Blanc 2014

A Crémant de Loire made entirely from organically-grown Chenin in a German-owned property established in Rochefort sur Loire 2014. This was described by judges as "elegant and respectful", with a nutty, rustic mustiness mid-palate and also vibrant hints of quince.

Ex cellars: €8-€11

www.domainevincendeau.com

Looking for UK representation



Domaine La Guillaumerie Crémant Brut Blanc de Blancs

Another pure Chenin, produced with fruit from a 19-hectare shale stone vineyard. It's crisp, fresh and lively, with hints of green apple. A good example of crémant at its simplest: a linear, versatile fizz that would make a great reception wine but would also work well with food.

Ex cellars: €2-€5

www.domainelaguillaumerie.com

Looking for UK representation



Domaine Langlois-Château Crémant Brut Blanc

Bollinger bought this 71-hectare Loire property in 1973. Only first pressings are used and wines age for a minimum of two years. This appealing blend of Chenin, Chardonnay and Cabernet France is full and rounded, with apples as well as hints of red fruit and honey.

Ex cellars: €5-€8

www.langlois-chateau.fr

Mentzendorff (matthieu@mentzendorff.co.uk)



Domaine Veuve Amiot Chardonnay

Apples may have been a recurring theme among most of the crémants in the tasting, but this example from the Loire stood out with its almost tropical character – apricots and peaches and even a hint of nougat were noted. A well-crafted softer style of crémant, in the opinion of the panelists.

Ex cellars: €2-€5

www.veuveamiot.fr

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Domaine Jaillance Crémant de Bordeaux Brut Blanc

Made from 100% Semillon by a producer established in 1950, this crémant has a smoky, bell-pepper nose and a palate of grapefruit and other citrus fruits. But there's also a quirky herbaceous note that adds extra complexity. An accomplished wine with a pleasing ripeness and good length.

Ex cellars: €2-€5

www.jaillance.com

Looking for UK representation

