

Success bubbles up in South America

The sparkling wine scene in South America is currently booming. Alejandro Iglesias finds out what's driving it and recommends bottles from the leading names in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay

AROUND THE WORLD, the consumption of sparkling wines is rising like bubbles in a glass, driven by the luxury goods market, new drinking habits and emerging economies. According to research by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV), sales increased by 30% between 2003 and 2013, while production was up 40% – that's six times more than the growth for still wines.

What's more, Champagne is no longer the default sparkling choice for many wine lovers. Since Cava and Prosecco have democratised the category, producers in other wine-growing regions – including South America – have decided to get in on the act.

With an annual production of 90 million bottles – just under a third of the annual output from Champagne – Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay offer sparkling wines that can seduce the most conservative of wine drinkers, as well as those looking for more offbeat styles. These wines have found an enthusiastic reception at home – up to 80% of wines produced never leave their native shores – which perhaps helps to explain why they have a lower profile in other countries than they deserve.

'Latin America is a market with a high consumption of sparkling wines and Champagne,' says Ramiro Otaño, regional managing director of Moët Hennessy Latin America & Caribbean. He highlights the excellent quality of the wines, the diversity of styles that are being made and a long sparkling winemaking tradition in the region as strong selling points when it comes to spreading the message more widely.

Production of sparkling wine in South America dates back to the early 20th century, when wineries responded to a growing local demand for Champagne. At that time an industrial boom had created a newly wealthy middle class of Latin Americans, who were

keen to travel to Europe, where they acquired a taste for luxuries such as Champagne. Over time, Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay each developed their own sparkling styles according to local tastes and preferences, with Champagne as a reference. 'South American sparkling wines now have an important opportunity in the world, not as competitors of traditional brands, but as an alternative for those seeking new expressions,' adds Otaño.

Argentina

The largest sparkling player in South America by far is Argentina, the only country from the region to make it into the top 10 sparkling wine producers in the world by volume, with around 50 million bottles per year.

The country has become a reference for South American sparkling wine, largely thanks to its long sparkling heritage – dating back to the arrival of Moët & Chandon in Mendoza's Uco Valley, for the inauguration of Chandon Argentina, the company's first subsidiary outside France, in 1959. This not only sparked a growth in domestic demand, but also paved the way for Argentinian sparkling wines to achieve international standards of quality. Crucially it also piqued the interest of other major producers, and over the years, GH Mumm, Codorníu and Freixenet – among others – have all invested in sparkling wine projects in Argentina.

In the past, Semillon and Chenin Blanc were used to make sparkling wines, but today the most widely planted grapes are Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, which are commonly blended in a Champagne-style cuvée. Those looking for a more distinctively Latin flavour can seek out wines made with Torrontés, or sparkling rosés from Malbec and Bonarda. Exciting examples to try include Tapiz Torrontés Extra Brut NV and the vintage Colonia Las Liebres Bonarda Rosé Brut Nature.



'Argentinian extra brut and brut styles make slightly drier alternatives to Prosecco'

Typical sparkling styles produced in Argentina are a reflection of those found in Champagne, although these wines display more moderate acidity than Champagne drinkers will be accustomed to. The most popular sweetness category is extra brut which, according to Argentinian legislation, allows up to 11g of residual sugar per litre, while other options include brut nature (up to 7g/l) and doux (over 40g/l).

Argentinian extra brut and brut styles make slightly drier alternatives to Prosecco, while cuveé prestige and brut nature sparklers can even surprise die-hard Champagne lovers. 'In Argentina we have substantial experience in the traditional method of second fermentation in the bottle, because people here have been drinking quality sparkling wines for a long time,' says Alejandro Martínez Rosell of Rosell Boher, a winery that began promoting premium Argentinian sparkling wines in 1999.

Although sparkling wines have historically been produced across all regions of Argentina, the Uco Valley is considered to be the source of the country's best examples. Its vineyards are located between 1,000m and 1,600m altitude, with a lot of sunshine, stony soils and a cool mountain climate that ensures ideal ripeness and natural acidity.

There are also promising new regions, especially the coastal vineyards near Mar del Plata, south of Buenos Aires. Trapiche owns Bodega Costa & Pampa winery here, with only 25.5ha of vineyard, around 20ha of which is in production and planted mainly >

with white grapes. The Costa & Pampa Extra Brut and Brut Rosé are thrilling sparklers.

It's important to note that Argentinian sparkling wines have also been making waves on the international scene, with several labels triumphing in international competitions. Cruzat Cuvée Réserve Rosé was awarded a Trophy for the Best in Show Sparkling Under £15 in DWWA 2014. Meanwhile in the 2017 edition of the Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, Chandon Rosé NV was named World Champion Rosé. The most surprising accolade, however, was the success of Bodega Bianchi's Stradivarius Extra Brut Cabernet Sauvignon 1998 in the renowned Effervescents du Monde competition in 2009. It ranked sixth in the list of 10 best sparkling wines tasted that year. H Schroeder Extra Brut, produced in Patagonia by Familia Schroeder, repeated that success in the 2017 edition of the competition, ranking 10th.

Brazil

Festivity, joy and celebration are all reasons to enjoy a glass of sparkling wine – and these are very much part of the Brazilian DNA. So it's no surprise that the wine scene in Brazil is big on bubbly. Most sparkling wine production happens in the region of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of Brazil. Here, 90% of



the 79,000ha of vineyards are planted with just four grapes: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling Itálico and Moscatel. Influenced by cool ocean breezes, the vineyards are located at between 300m and 800m above sea level, on slopes of volcanic soil, giving a fresh, mineral character to the wines.

The most common production method here is Charmat, with brut and extra brut the most popular styles for dry sparkling wines. The Moscatel grape is synonymous with fruity wines that are simple, fresh and sweet, made with Prosecco in mind.

Fuelled by the arrival of Moët & Chandon in 1973 – who founded Chandon Brazil in the town of Garibaldi in the foothills of the Serra Gaúcha, a mountainous region located in northeastern Rio Grande do Sul – production of Brazilian sparkling wines now stands at around 20 million bottles annually, according to Wines of Brazil. Among the leading names are Miolo, Salton, Aurora, Peterlongo and Valduga – but there are also many exciting smaller producers to look out for.

Among these is Mario Geisse, a Chilean winemaker who arrived in 1976 to manage the vineyards of Chandon Brazil. In 1979 he

Left: Chandon Rosé NV from Argentina scooped the impressive title of 2017 World Champion Rosé



Above left: harvest time at Argentina's Bodega Cruzat
Above right: Mario Geisse of Cave Geisse in Serra Gaúcha, Brazil

founded Cave Geisse in the Serra Gaúcha. Its range shows the potential of the region for the production of high-end wines, especially Cave Geisse Terroir Nature. 'The Serra Gaúcha is a very complex region with different micro-terroirs. The future of our wines lies in the interpretation of these diverse soils, climates and altitudes,' explains Geisse, whose wines come from the GI Pinto Bandeira, the leading region for production of traditional-method sparkling wines.

Chile

Renowned for its energetic reds and vibrant whites, Chile is a relative newcomer to the

sparkling wine arena. Although some wineries – such as Valdivieso and Undurraga – do have a long tradition of making sparkling wines, production has only accelerated in the last five years. 'Until a few years ago, we defined ourselves as importers of sparkling wines, but today our intention is to reach the world with our own bottles,' says Cristián Rodríguez Larraín, general manager of Emiliana, who is delighted by the growing demand for Emiliana Organic Brut in export markets.

Many of Chile's sparkling wines are made with grapes from vineyards planted in the same valleys that gave worldwide recognition to the country's white wines, namely: ➤

Sparkling style: Iglesias picks his top fizz buys



Rosell Boher, Grande Cuveé Millésimée, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2014 94

N/A UK www.rosellboher.com
The eighth release of Alejandro Martínez Rosell's prestige cuveé, first produced in 1999. This blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay spends 40 months on lees. A pale gold colour in the glass, with lively bubbles. Biscuit complexity, fragrant with a creamy texture, yet refreshing and dry on the finish. **Drink 2018-2025 Alcohol 12.5%**

Azur, Brut, Limari Valley, Chile NV 93
N/A UK www.azur.cl

A traditional-method sparkler from the Limari Valley. It spends 36 months on lees until it reaches a bright lemon colour, with persistent bubbles and aromas of bread

crust, yeast and dry stone fruits. A creamy palate but delicate with a dry finish. This wine is a gem. **Drink 2018-2025 Alc 12%**



Cave Geisse, Extra Brut, Pinto Bandeira, Serra Gaúcha, Brazil 2014 93
£23 **Go Brazil**

Mario Geisse is an expert in traditional-method bubbles. He produces this Pinot Noir and Chardonnay blend with 36 months of lees contact. Lemon bright colour, boasting fine bubbles and some autolysis complexity, with notes of brioche, yeast and nuts. Rich and creamy mousse with an off-dry finish. **Drink 2018-2025 Alc 12%**

Zuccardi, Blanc de Blancs, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2012 93
£22 **Alliance Wine, Carruthers & Kent**

Sebastian Zuccardi's 100% Chardonnay sparkler comes from vineyards in San Pablo, an extreme and cool terroir located in the Uco Valley. Pale lemon in colour with zippy bubbles in the glass. Deep aromas of citrus and floral notes, alongside fresh yeast and attractive toasty hints. Boasts an agile mid-palate, with a dry and long-lasting finish. **Drink 2018-2025 Alc 13%**



Chandon Argentina, Baron B Cuvée Spéciale Extra Brut, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina NV 92

N/A UK www.lvmh.com
This label is a tribute to Baron Bertrand de Ladoucette, Moët & Chandon emissary during the 1950s, when the company launched Chandon Argentina. It is a classic style that delivers a serious Champenoise profile with yeasty

and bready notes, brioche, rose and citrus. A rich mousse, but the finish is refreshing and dry. **Drink 2018-2023 Alc 12%**



Cruzat, Cuvée Nature, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina NV 92
£25 **Pampas Wines**

Pale lemon with fine bubbles. Expressive and fragrant on the nose with fresh red fruits, citrus and mid-autolysis complexity. It tastes sharp and lively, with a rich mousse, followed by fresh citrus notes, vibrant acidity and a dry finish. **Drink 2018-2025 Alc 12%**

Campos de Cima, Brut Champenoise, Campanha Oriental, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil 2012 91
£20 **Go Brazil**

A blend of 70% Chardonnay with 30% Pinot Noir that displays a pale golden colour and

fine bubbles. A significant presence of yeasts and nutty aromas. On the palate it is complex and tasty, with a medium body and dry finish. Offers great quality for the price. **Drink 2018-2023 Alc 12.5%**



Gouguenheim, Malbec Bubbles Rosé, Tupungato, Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina NV 91
£12.95 **Davy's, Lanchester Wines**

Sparkling Malbec rosés are gaining popularity in Argentina. This Uco Valley example is one of the pioneers, with a pale pink colour and energetic bubbles. Fresh cherries, plums and blueberries to the fore, with hints of fresh yeast, blossom and white fruits. Vibrant. **Drink 2018-2022 Alc 12%**

Miguel Torres Chile, Estelado Rosé, Maule Valley, Chile 2016 91

£14.99 **Houltz, Soho Wine Supply, Taylor's Fine Wine, The Bottle Stop, Trina's Wines**

Pale pink with lively bubbles. Expressive, fresh red fruit character that's slightly rustic but seductive and original, with the style of the País variety. Vibrant and fruity mid-palate, creamy and refreshing finish. **Drink 2018-2023 Alc 12%**



Pisano, Tannat Brut Nature, Progreso, Canelones, Uruguay NV 94

£18 **Ellis of Richmond**
An exotic red sparkling wine produced by the Pisano brothers using Tannat grapes. This is a limited-edition bottling that offers a purple colour with violet bubbles. Full of plum and blueberry fruits with bready and yeasty hints, an intense and fruity palate with an off-dry but refreshing finish. **Drink 2018-2023 Alc 13.5%**

Permitted residual sugar for sparkling styles in g/l				
	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Uruguay
Nature	0-3	0-3	-	-
Brut Nature	4-7	-	0-3	2-3
Extra Brut	8-11	4-6	4-6	4-5
Brut	12-15	7-15	7-12	6-10
Extra Dry/Sec	-	-	13-17	11-20
Dry/Sec	-	16-20	18-32	-
Demi Sec	16-40	21-60	33-50	21-25
Doux (Sweet)	> 40	> 60	> 50	> 25

‘Until a few years ago, Chileans defined themselves as importers of sparkling wines, but today our intention is to reach the world with our own bottles’ **Cristián Rodríguez Larraín**

Casablanca, San Antonio, Limarí and Bío Bío. The key to these terroirs is their cool climate and the oceanic influence, which translate into good natural acidity. As in Argentina, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir take centre stage, although there are curiosities, such as the Santa Digna Estelado sparkling País made by Miguel Torres and Mujer Andina’s Levita Brut Rosé, a 100% Syrah from the Maipo Valley.

The most common production method is Charmat, as in Brazil, though traditional-method wines with long ageing on lees are becoming more popular. These include the new project by Rafael Guilisasti Gana, vice chairman of Concha y Toro. Together with Franciacorta consultants and the Italian winemaker, Carlo Franchini, Guilisasti is promoting the first dedicated sparkling wine

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Below: Concha y Toro’s vineyards, situated in Puente Alto in Chile

project in Chile, located in the Limarí Valley and producing only sparkling wines. ‘Azur is the result of our quest for the best terroirs for sparkling wines,’ explains Francisco Molina, commercial manager of this new venture that makes a limited production of Azur Brut, a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with 36 months’ ageing in the bottle.

Uruguay

For some time, Uruguay has been promoting its single-varietal red wines made with the Tannat grape. However, wine experts are paying increasing attention to the country’s whites – particularly those from vineyards near the Río de la Plata in the south and facing the Atlantic Ocean in the north. In these two areas winemakers are able to produce white wines characterised by a rich and vibrant palate. Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Albariño are the grape varieties showing most potential in these regions.

Among the most recognised sparkling wine producers in Uruguay is Francisco Carrau. His Sust Brut Nature is a cuvée of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay made from grapes grown in Cerro Chapeu, in northern Uruguay, on the border with Brazil. The wine is a tribute to his grandfather, who produced the first sparkling wine in Uruguay in 1931.

Another name to look out for is Viña Edén, an enterprise in the rocky hillsides near Punta del Este, which produces two sparkling wines that express the mineral profile of the granite soils of their vineyard. Meanwhile, in the region of Progreso, the nerve centre of the Uruguayan wine industry, the Pisano brothers are making one of the most exotic wines of the region, a Brut Nature Tannat. With such experimentation ongoing, the likelihood of more high-quality sparkling wines starting to emerge from Uruguay seems high. **D**

