

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

June 7, 2026 – AGM

CLASS H – SPARKLING

Presented by Master Wine Judges
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(Victoria Chapter)

For the benefit of newly-certified Judges and trainees (and those not yet qualified to judge Class H - Sparkling Wine), we urge you to read the previously prepared Presentation Notes on this subject which appear on the Guild's website (www.bcgwj.ca). In particular, we recommend reading:

- Mary Homer *Presentation Notes from June 2009*
- Sheridan Scott and Julian Young *Presentation Notes from 2018*

BCAWA DESCRIPTION OF CLASS H – SPARKLING WINE:

There are sparkling wines made that are appropriate for all occasions. All wines with detectable carbon dioxide pressure in the bottle and showing visible sparkle in the glass should be entered in this class. Wines sparkled by the Champagne method have an unmistakable yeasty flavour which adds to their complexity. Those that have been carbonated tend to exhibit fruitier characteristics. Cloudy sediment of any kind, in the bottle or in the glass, is unacceptable. [The one exception to this would be if the Ancestral Method was used to make the wine; in which case, the competitor should have that information indicated on the wine entry.] The presence of a secondary fermentation capsule(s) in the bottle is not a fault. There is no restriction on ingredients.

BCAWA Technical Characteristics:

Ingredients:	No restrictions
Alcohol:	9% - 12%
Colour:	No restrictions
Sugar:	0% - 6%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 to 1.014
Acid:	9 – 12 g/L
pH:	2.8 – 3.4

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM THIS SPARKLING WINE FLIGHT?

- You will be exposed to wines ranking from “no medal” to Bronze Medal to Silver Medal and to Gold Medal.
- You will be exposed to wines made using the Methode Champenoise, the Charmat Method, and the Transvasation (the Transfer) Procedure.
- You will be exposed to wines made in 7 different countries and 4 different continents
- You will be exposed to wines made using a variety of grapes (ranging from Chardonnay, Meunier, Pinot Noir, Chenin Blanc, Riesling, Syrah, Glera, Macabeo, Semillon and Lambrusco Maestri).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROSECCO and CHAMPAGNE:

(*Charmat Method* and *Methode Champenoise*)

Where are they made?

Prosecco is a sparkling wine produced only in the—wait for it—Prosecco region of Italy, just a stone's throw away from Venice. This idyllic setting is made up of beautiful, green hillsides and gets lavish amounts of both rainfall and sunshine.

Champagne is produced exclusively in the—you guessed it—Champagne region of France, about 120 miles East of Paris. The Champagne region has a cool, moody climate and features a unique blend of rolling hills and lush forests.

How do they taste?

While both Prosecco and Champagne are delicious in their own ways, they taste very different. Champagnes are creamy and nutty with yeasty aromas like baked brioche, while Proseccos are crisp and refreshing with more fruity and floral notes. You'll also notice that Champagne produces teeny tiny bubbles, while Prosecco bubbles are lively and abundant.

Prosecco opens with aromas of fresh-picked citrus and honeysuckle blossoms, followed by fruity flavors of green apple, juicy peach and ripe melon, and framed by hints of minerality.

When should they be enjoyed?

Champagne is an excellent choice for decidedly formal events and is often served as a toast at weddings or other major celebrations.

In contrast, Prosecco and Prosecco Rosé are perfect for life's more spontaneous moments. It was designed to bring joy to everyday moments.

How do you make them?

Did you know that all sparkling wines start as a still (non-bubbly) wine? Prosecco is made from Glera grapes while a Champagne is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes. The signature bubbles in both wines are then achieved through a second round of fermentation.

It's in the second fermentation, where Prosecco and Champagne really begin to take different paths. Champagne is fermented inside the bottle using the traditional *Methode Champenoise*. Prosecco undergoes a newer, innovative process called *Charmat Method*, where the secondary fermentation takes place in a pressure-rated tank, which takes place before the wine is bottled. While each of these methods allow the grapes and wine to taste their best, the Prosecco method also happens to be more efficient, allowing it to offer incredible taste with a more petite price tag.

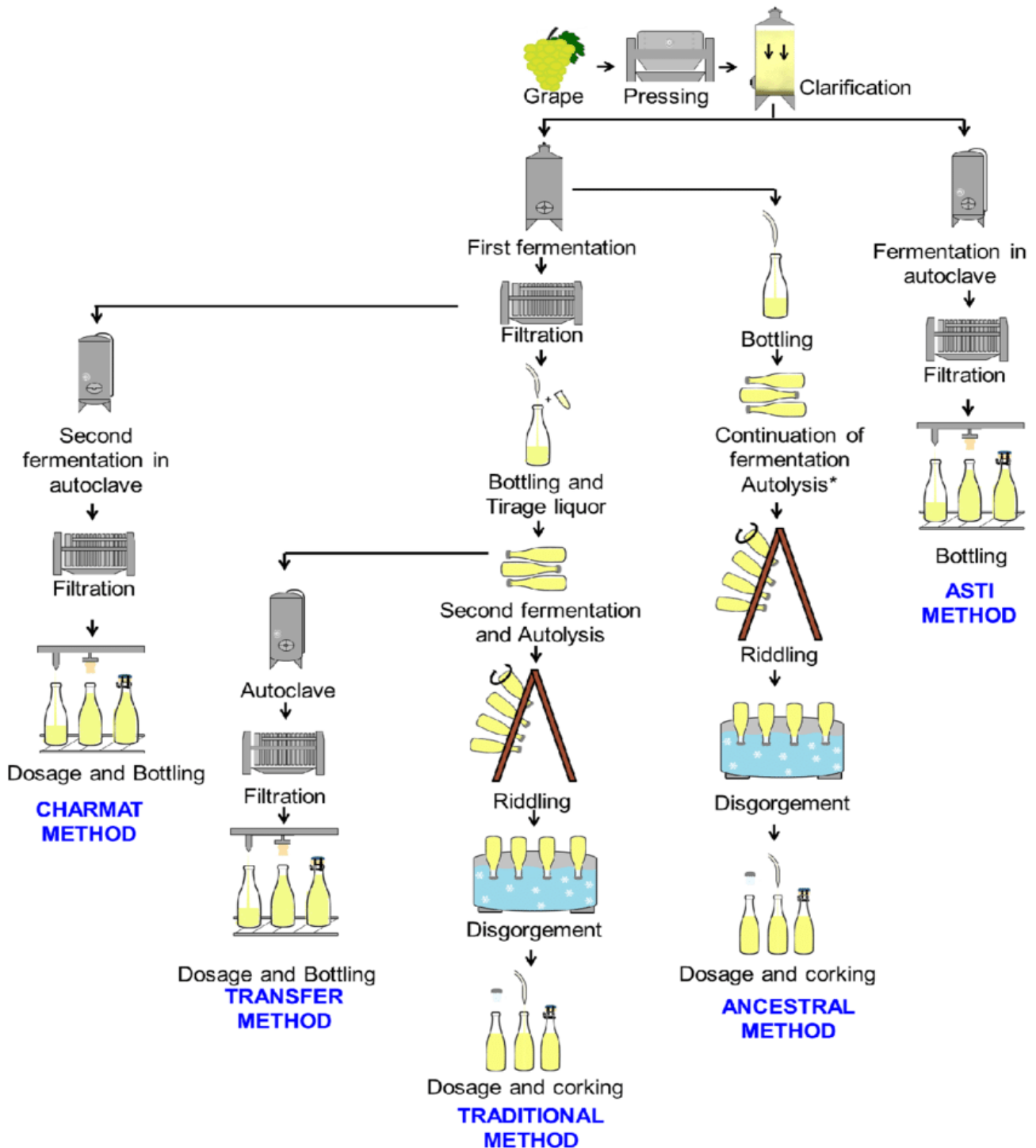
NOT ALL SPARKLING WINE FROM FRANCE IS A CHAMPAGNE

There are many sparkling wines that are produced using the traditional method (or *méthode Champenoise*) but only sparkling wines produced in the Champagne region of France in accordance with specific appellation laws can be labeled as *Champagne*. For example, in other areas of France a sparkling wine may be labeled as a *Crémant* or in Canada and the US the label may indicate the production method or the level of sweetness such as *brut* or *sec* or may simply say that it is a sparkling wine.

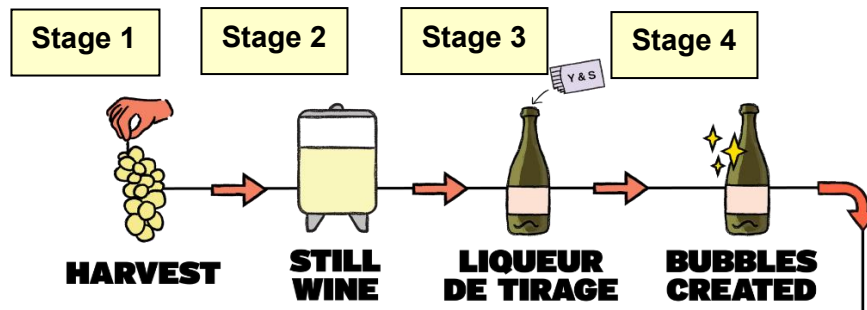
METHODS USED

While the vast majority of sparkling wines are made using the traditional method or the Charmat method, there are at least three others worth mentioning; specifically, the transvasation (or Transfer) method, the ancestral method and the Asti method. These five methods are illustrated in the following diagram. In addition, some winemakers simply inject carbon dioxide into the base wine, using the soda or carbonation method.

In this sparkling wine flight, you will find examples of wines produced using the traditional method, the Charmat method and the transfer method. Detailed notes are provided on their production.



MÉTHODE CHAMPENOISE (traditional method) is a specific production process used to make top-quality sparkling wines in the Champagne region of France. **Dom Perignon** is famously associated with the development of Champagne in the 17th century (as a Benedictine monk of Hautvillers Abbey). While he did not invent sparkling wine itself, he made significant contributions to improving the production and quality of Champagne, particularly in the methods of blending and using specific grapes. In 1662, **Christopher Merrett**, an English scientist, presented a paper to the Royal Society detailing how British winemakers were adding sugar and molasses to wine to create effervescence, essentially the first documented explanation of the process in creating sparkling wine. This discovery predates Dom Perignon's arrival at Hautvillers. Here's an overview of the main stages:



Stage 1: Harvesting and initial vinification

It all starts with the careful selection of grapes at harvest time. The grapes used to make Champagne are generally Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. After harvesting, the grapes are used to produce a low-alcohol still wine base.

Stage 2: Blending and setting the foam

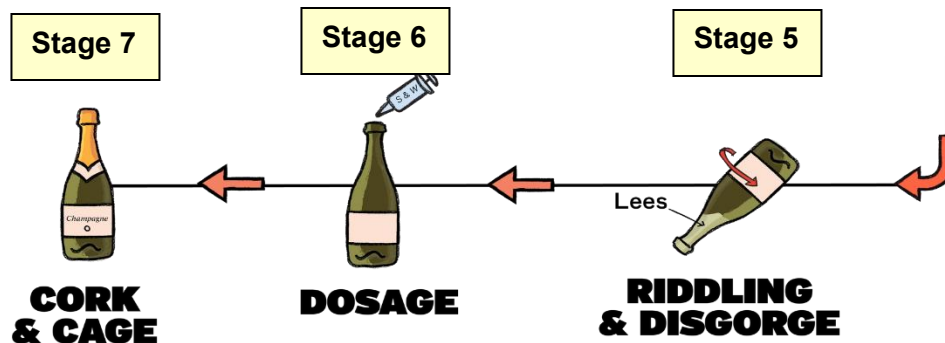
Once the different still wines have been produced, the blending is carried out by the cellar masters. They blend different wines from different grape varieties and harvest years to obtain a coherent taste profile characteristic of Champagne.

Stage 3: Liqueur de Tirage

Next, a liqueur de tirage made from sugar and yeast is added to the blended wine, and the bottle is sealed with a hermetic cap.

Stage 4: Bottle fermentation

This is the key stage in the Champagne method. The bottle is placed in a cellar at a controlled temperature, usually between 10 and 15 degrees Celsius. The yeast consumes the added sugar, producing carbon dioxide and alcohol. This in-bottle fermentation creates Champagne's emblematic bubbles.



Stage 5: Riddling and disgorging

After bottle fermentation, dead yeast settles in the neck of the bottle. To remove them, the bottle is tilted and turned daily in a process called riddling. Once the yeast has collected in the neck, the bottle is quickly disgorged. The neck is immersed in a frozen solution that expels the frozen yeast in the form of an ice cube.

Stage 6: Dosage

After disgorging, a mixture of wine and sugar, called liqueur d'expédition, is added to adjust the sugar level of the Champagne. This stage, called dosage, determines the type of Champagne (brut, dry, demi-sec, sweet, etc.).

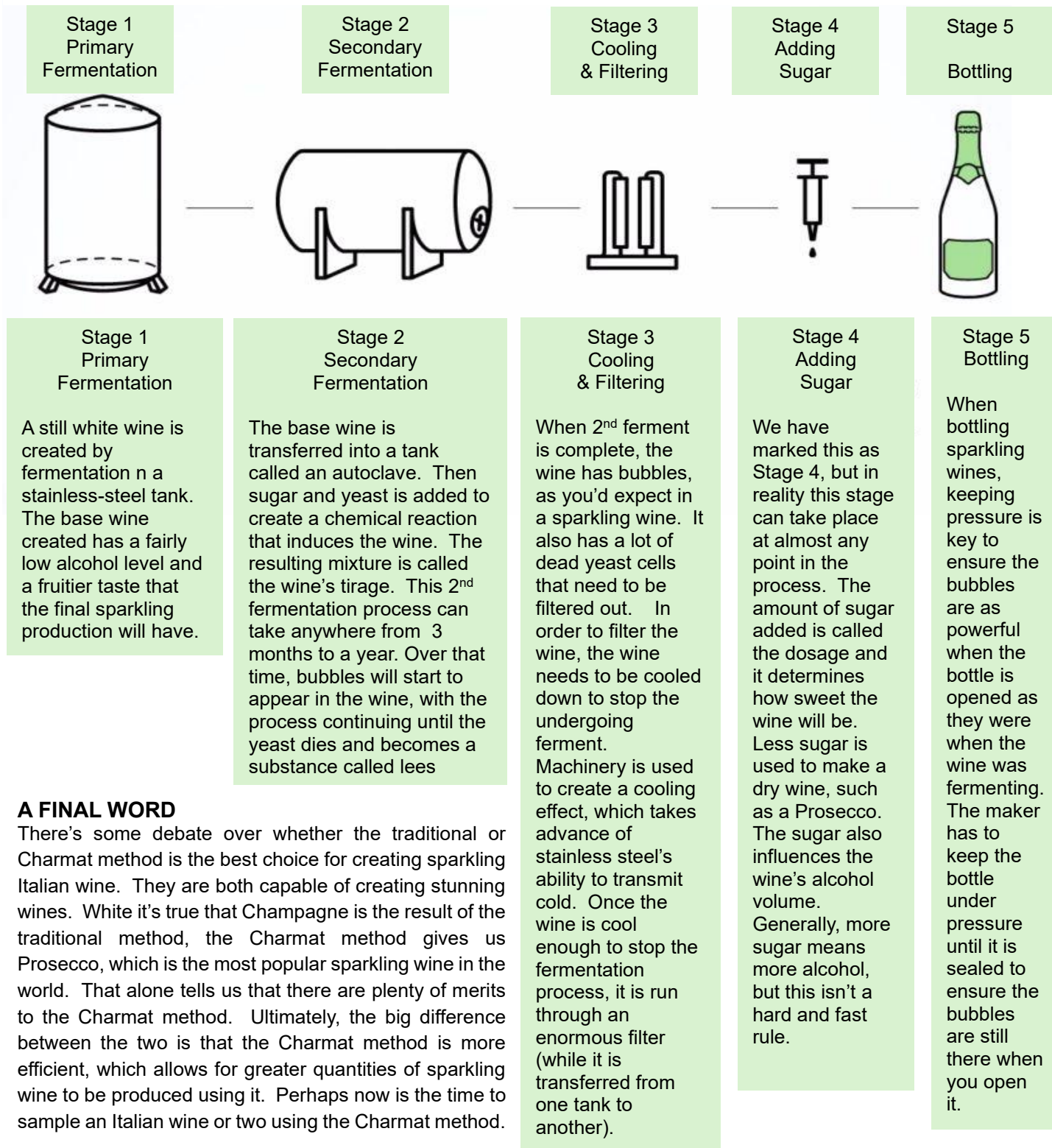
Stage 7: Aging The Champagne bottle is then corked and caged and aged in the cellar for a period ranging from a few months to several years, giving it its complexity and unique character.

MARTINOTTI “CHARMAT” METHOD

Sparkling Wine Production

The Martinotti method (or the tank method) was invented in 1959 by an Italian winemaker named Eugene Martinotti. However, 12 years later, a French producer named Eugene Charmat tweaked Martinotti’s original method, creating the Charmat method that we know today.

The Charmat Method incorporates the 5-stage process that is explained below:

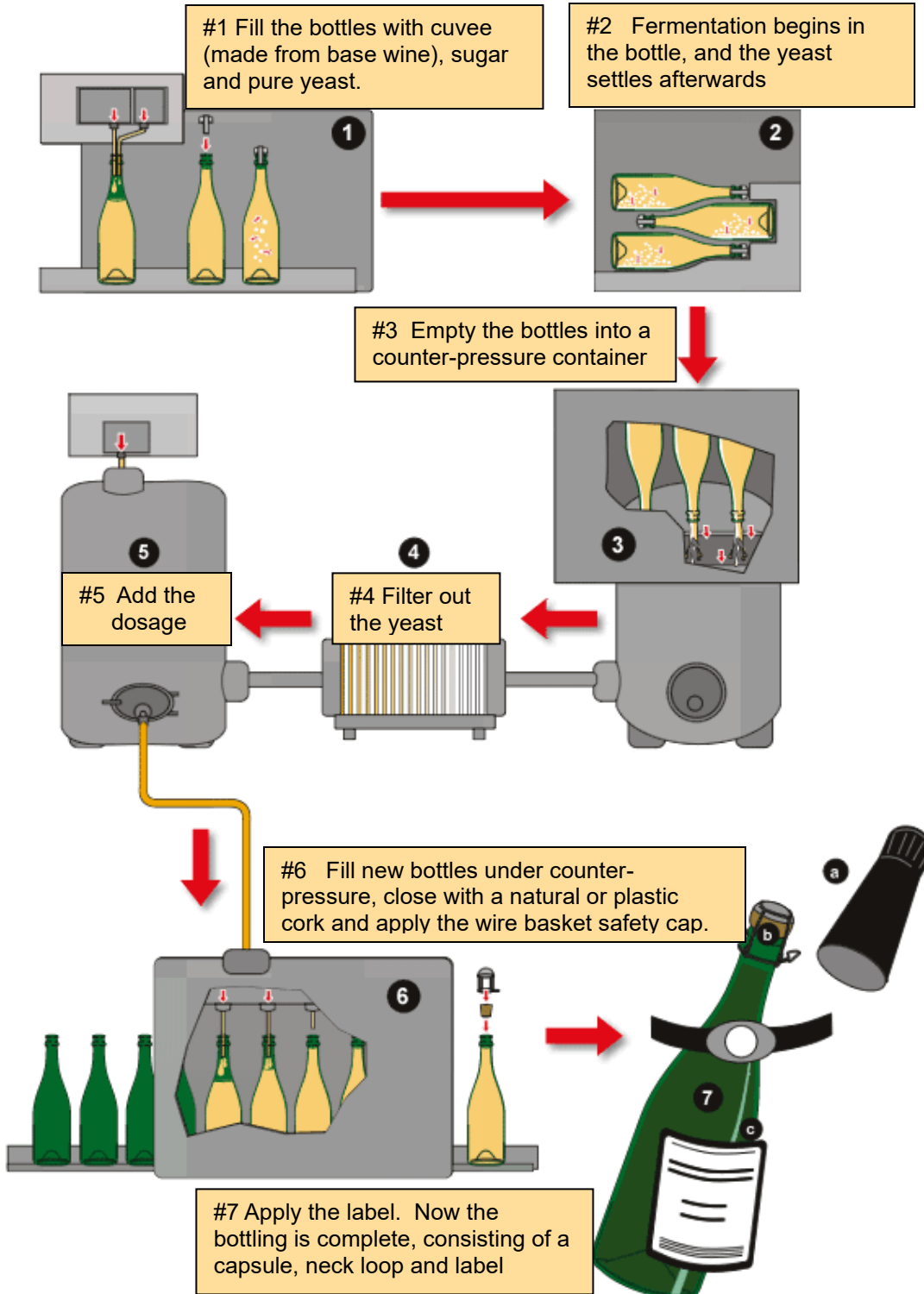


A FINAL WORD

There’s some debate over whether the traditional or Charmat method is the best choice for creating sparkling Italian wine. They are both capable of creating stunning wines. While it’s true that Champagne is the result of the traditional method, the Charmat method gives us Prosecco, which is the most popular sparkling wine in the world. That alone tells us that there are plenty of merits to the Charmat method. Ultimately, the big difference between the two is that the Charmat method is more efficient, which allows for greater quantities of sparkling wine to be produced using it. Perhaps now is the time to sample an Italian wine or two using the Charmat method.

TRANSVASATION (TRANSFER) METHOD

Process commonly used in the production of sparkling wine, which is a hybrid of the traditional *méthode champenoise* and the *method Charmat* (tank fermentation). In France, this is also known as the "German method". The second fermentation and ageing on the lees still takes place in the bottle. However, the bottles are then transferred to large containers in which the yeast is removed using filters. The shipping dosage is added while still in the large container, followed by bottling and corking. This saves the time-consuming remuage (riddling) and disgorgement (removal of yeast sediment from the bottle).



LABEL IDENTIFIER:

Within the European Union, the text "bottle fermentation" (in the USA "bottle fermented") may appear on the bottle label, which indicates the transvasation process in this form of production.

HOW TO JUDGE A SPARKLING WINE FLIGHT:

Judges and Trainees when given the responsibility of evaluating Sparkling Wines should keep the following points in mind:

1. There are sparkling wines made that are appropriate for all occasions. They can be drunk without food or with any course from hors d'oeuvres through dessert, including after-dinner cheese or nuts. Accordingly, sweetness levels will vary. However, the sugar levels should never be cloying. The appropriate amount of acidity applies in sparkling wines as it does with still wines. The wines should finish clean in your mouth.
2. They can come in any of the non-fortified wine colours from pale green, clear, straw, gold, rose, and orange to all shades of red (but not brown). Ask yourself if the appearance is limpid, sparkling, or silky?
3. All sparkling wines should be brilliantly clear: haziness and sediments are unacceptable.
4. The bubbles should be numerous, fine and continuously rising from the bottom of the glass for at least an hour. The bubbles should not froth or form a head in the glass. What are the bubbles like? Are they light, fine, lively, plentiful, slow or coarse? When looking straight down into your champagne flute, do the bubbles form a pearl necklace? Is it discreet or intense? It is interesting to observe these different characteristics in sparkling wines. In the mouth, bubbles should form a tingling, effervescent, fine mousse when passed through the teeth. This test is valuable to evaluate the initial sparkle and the sparkle retention, some fifteen or twenty minutes later.
5. Yeasty aromas and bready flavours are respected qualities of classic champagnes. These qualities are indicative of wines that have been processed by the Methode Champenoise or the traditional method. These qualities result from wine maturing on "the lees" (aka "dead yeast cells"). Other aromas found in sparkling wine made in the traditional method may include butter, dough, toast, vegemite, nuts, oysters, and other savoury aromas.
6. Fruity or floral aromas would be evidence of a sparkling wine made from the Charmat method or by injection of carbon dioxide. These aromas can range from citrus fruits, red fruits (berries, cherries, etc.), hard fruits (apples, pears, etc.), soft fruits (peaches, nectarines, apricots), and tropical fruits (mango, banana, coconut, lychee), to floral notes (wild roses, lime blossoms, orange blossoms, and violets).
7. Other aromas and flavours should be pleasing and inviting: Off aromas and off flavours are not appropriate. So briefly, for judging in amateur wine competitions, ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. Is this wine CLEAN or is it OFF?
 - b. If it is CLEAN, is it also COMPLEX?
 - c. Are the bubbles SUFFICIENT initially and do they last an APPROPRIATE length of time?

JUDGING THE SPARKLE OF A WINE:

You must be careful not to judge the sparkle by simply looking at a glass that has been sitting for a period of time. As we know, wine sparkle can be retained in a glass due to irritants (i.e. dust or imperfect glass surface). There can often be a marked difference between two glasses of the same wine due to “irritant” factors in one of the two glasses. If the glass is clean and without irritants there should be very little sign of any activity if the wine has good sparkle retention. If the wine has poor sparkle-retention it will be fizzing (i.e. not retaining its sparkle) and will very shortly fall flat. It is suggested that judges use some positive tests as to determine whether there is sparkle-retention by:

- re-tasting the wine and using mouth feel to determine whether the wine is still lively; and/or
- pour the remaining wine into a different glass to see if there is still “fizz”, and/or
- try dropping an “irritant” (grain of sugar, sand, or salt) into the glass which should produce a steady stream of bubbles.
- Adding carbon dioxide to a still wine with high acid is what gives sparkling wine its crisp refreshing quality. The sparkling wines of Champagne, in France’s most northerly grape growing area, was the solution to improving and making drinkable the naturally over-acidic still wines of the region.

REFERENCES:

- BCAWA Competition Handbook (Official Classes)
- WineFolly.com
- WineFlavorGuru.com
- Wein.Plus
- BaldacciFamilyVineyards.com
- Blog.xtrawine.com
- Presentation Notes from June 2009