

Forbes

Valentine's Day Gift Guide: The Top Champagnes Under \$100



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Spirits

I write about wines and spirits and the hidden corners of the world

Champagne is the sparkling wine produced in the same named region of France. Located just east of Paris, it is produced in a zone that runs from Reims to Sézanne, with Epernay at its heart.

It is a wine inexorably linked with love and romance, although both the origins and the reasons for that association have never been convincingly explained.

Champagne was first associated with the royal court in France, and from there spread to other royal courts throughout Europe. It quickly became an aspirational drink.

More complicated to produce than still wine and therefore more expensive, its public consumption was a statement that conveyed that the drinker was socially and financially successful.

Louis XV was famous for plying his “Official Chief Mistress”, Madame de Pompadour, one of his many paramours, with copious quantities of Champagne. Yes, that actually was an official position in the Versailles court. Indeed, legend has it that if the king presented a lady of the court with a glass of Champagne an invitation to his bedchamber was not far behind.

In modern times, we have Ian Fleming's character of James Bond. A British spy and notorious rake who was as deadly with a bottle of Bollinger as he was with his Walther PPK.

One intriguing theory is that the aroma of Champagne mimics female pheromones. That little tidbit invariably pops up in Valentine Day's articles about the romantic allure of Champagne. It's an idea that's firmly embedded in urban legend, although I've never seen that it has actually been proven by anyone.

If that was true, then Champagne would be used by women to attract men and not, as popular films and literature portray, by men to attract women.

Enough speculation. Regardless of what effects Champagne has on the drinker, it's a delightful beverage to share with your special other on Valentine's Day, or any other day of the year.

More importantly, below are more than a dozen Champagnes priced at an average retail price (ARP) between \$25 to \$100. Stylistically they range from extra dry (Brut Nature) to slightly sweet (Demi Sec). Some have classic names others are from lesser-known producers. They're all excellent and are delightful to drink, especially when shared with that special someone.

Last, but not least, is the **Bollinger, Special Cuvée, Brut Champagne, ARP \$60**

A blend of 60% Pinot Noir, 25% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Meunier assembled from more than 300 crus. 15% of the blend is fermented in old oak barrels. It has a deep, rich, full-bodied flavor offering crème brûlée, lemon curd, baked stone fruit, toast, roasted nuts and a hint of smoke. A Champagne classic.

These are all outstanding Champagnes, exceptionally priced and bursting with flavor. They will make excellent choices to accompany a Valentine's Day meal, but don't limit yourself to just Valentine's Day. These are Champagnes that you should drink every day!

Cheers