

Five Affordable Sparkling Wines For Valentine's Day

Maybe your Valentine's Day budget isn't quite as plump this year and, while you still want to celebrate, you'd like to tame the costs a bit. I tasted through a range of sparkling wines that were priced at under \$20 a bottle. Easy and simple wines did not make the cut. I was looking for complexity at a great price—after all, we are talking about a drink for celebrating the most complex thing of all: love.

Bisolo Jeio Cuvee Rose (\$16): This sparkling appears quite dark in the glass—a deeper wild salmon red hue. Grown in the cooler northern climate of Italy's northern Veneto region, the wine is a combination of pinot noir and merlot (which explains the richer color). Have to admit I was suspect about this wine as more tannic red grapes can often yield unpleasant surprises in a sparkling, but the first sip was joyful with abundant cherries, citrus and mineral. I sipped it with a bowl of Ramen—talk about a budget meal. A terrifically intense and crisp sparkling that will pair nicely with food too.

2014 Secco Italian Bubbles, Chardonnay (13.99): Washington state winemaker Charles Smith teamed up with Ginevra and Olivia Casa to create this playful, easy-drinking sparkling wine made entirely from chardonnay grapes grown in Italy's Veneto region. Lively and crisp, this is a party-in-a-glass style of bubbly, perfect for popcorn and a movie with your sweetie.

Graham Beck Brut Rose NV, South Africa (\$17): This is one of my new favorite sparkling wine/value brands largely because they produce tasty quality in large quantities. Often many lovely values in sparkling are hard to find, but I can almost always find a Graham Beck or a Gruet (my other go-to value bubbly) in a pinch. This wine was made from pinot noir and chardonnay grapes that were hand-picked and whole bunch pressed. This sparkling delivers a rich mousse texture, pearly bubbles and notes of raspberry and lemon.

Just Over Budget: Roederer Estate Brut Rose NV, CA, (\$28) OK, yes, this bubbly is over the \$20 mark, but it is without a doubt one of the finest expressions of Anderson Valley pinot noir and chardonnay fruit, and as close as you may get to

experiencing a “Champagne” moment with sparkling wine. Strawberry, raspberry, lacy bubbles and a nice wire of minerality make this sparkling both charming and complex.

Champagne Cheat: The Moët & Chandon Impérial Rosé NV, (\$20, in mini size): No, it’s not a whole bottle, but for \$20 you get two nice glasses of what is normally a \$55 bottle of Champagne. It’s a bite-size splurge of delicate pink fruits, lemon cream and racy bubbles.