



# Wine Club Tasting Notes

## December 2007

### Mumm Napa Blanc de Noirs Brut Napa Valley, California

We always like to end the year with a bang at Gervais & Vine by giving you wines that are in our two favorite categories – Spanish red and yummy Bubbly! The management, the wait staff and even the kitchen staff LOVE practically anything with bubbles and red, red wine. (Our consumption of bubbles around here borders on the absurd.) But first, I must let off some steam with a mini-rant: There are those people out there who think that Champagne and sparkling wines are *only* for special occasions. Well, we're here to tell you that simply being *alive* is special occasion enough for us to drink bubbles. Oh, and a perennial favorite exclamation we get is, "I don't drink Champagne because it gives me a headache." We call BS on that one, too. Cheap sparkling wine that is served at wedding receptions is usually to blame for this. Let me put it this way, enough booze of any kind – *especially* if it's cheap – will give you a headache, and I guarantee you the eight cocktails you sucked down at the reception while dancing like a lunatic is more to blame than the one glass of sparkling wine you consumed. Also, Champagne and sparkling wine are some of the most food-friendly wines there are. Period. Whew, I feel better.

Now for a lesson on how Champagne is made. The traditional method of making sparkling wine developed in France's Champagne region. This process consists of taking various still wines and blending them to make a *cuvée* that represents the style of a winery or champagne house. A complex *cuvée* can consist of as many as thirty to forty different wines. Once the various wines are blended in large blending vats, a bottling *dosage* (also known as *dosage d'tirage* or *liqueur d'tirage*), a syrupy mixture of sugar and wine (and sometimes brandy and/or citric acid), is added along with special yeasts. The *cuvée* is then immediately bottled and corked. The sugar (in the bottling dosage) and the yeast cells cause a *secondary fermentation* to take place in the bottle. This results in the creation of additional alcohol and carbon dioxide gas, which gives the wine its effervescence or "sparkle." During this secondary fermentation, pressure in the bottle builds up to 90 to 110 pounds per square inch (psi). If less bottling dosage is used in the *cuvée*, there will be less pressure, which will result in a lightly sparkling wine style called *crémant*. Such wines have slightly more than half the pressure of a regular bottling. Sediment is also thrown off during the second fermentation and is removed through the steps of *riddling* and *disgorging*. Just before final bottling, a shipping dosage (*dosage d'expédition* or *liqueur d'expédition*), sugar, and some of the same *cuvée* (reserved for this purpose) is added. The percentage of sugar in the shipping dosage determines the degree of sweetness in the final wine. From driest to sweetest, sparkling wines are classified as *brut*, *extra dry* (or *extra-sec*), *sec*, *demi-sec* or *doux*. Once the final handling is complete and the bottles are recorked, the final pressure in a standard bottle ranges from 60 to 90 psi. The words "méthode champenoise" are used only on labels of wines that use this method.

The allowed grape varieties in the Champagne region of France are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. While California doesn't have the same strict laws regarding which grapes can go into a sparkling wine, Mumm Napa does keep with Old World tradition by using primarily Pinot Noir with a dollop of Chardonnay in this gorgeous Blanc de Noirs, which means "white wine of black grapes" (or in this case, white-ish wine). This charming pale salmon-colored sparkling wine displays

pretty red apple and pear fruit with subtle hints of cherry and brioche, followed by a clean, dry, refreshing finish. Because of its structure, this wine will pair with many different types of food, but my suggestion during this holiday season is to give *yourself* a Christmas present and sip this wine while savoring caviar...(Why not? You deserve it!)