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The Champagne Companion: The Authoritative Connoisseur's Guide



Synopsis

"The Champagne Companion" is the definitive guide to the most exuberant of wines. With a format like "The Red Wine Companion" and "The White Wine Companion," this new title features more than 100 brands of champagne, all of the grand marques, plus many smaller growers. With expert tasting notes and advice on buying, serving and storing, this book provides readers with all they need to know to feel confident ordering champagne in restaurants and buying in stores. Michael Edwards decodes champagne labels, describes in detail the champagne-making process and provides star-ratings for each brand. Ninety years of vintage assessments - back to 1904 - are included, from Brut non-vintage to the prestige cuvees. Readers will learn all about: * how champagne is made, now and historically * champagne politics, including why for centuries only a select few could use the name "Champagne" * the intricate vineyards of the French Champagne country and the important wineries * the differences between non-vintage, rose and prestige champagnes * how to read labels and recognize wineries * vintage years to look for - and those to avoid * champagne etiquette, including de-corking, serving, testing and proper glassware * champagne terminology

The directory of champagnes is the heart of this book. Each entry - from one to two pages - features a photo of the labeled bottle, the number of bottles produced annually, the district, and the author's extensive expert tasting notes. Many entries also include food recommendations, additional labels and photographs of the grape-growing region. Whether for the neophyte who is just discovering champagne's intrigue and finesse, or for the connoisseur wishing to learn more, "The Champagne Companion" reveals all the secrets behind the bubbles. Michael Edwards is an acclaimed wine journalist and author of "The Red Wine Companion" and co-author of "The Companion to Wine." He is the wine correspondent for "Caterer and Hotelkeeper" and is widely acknowledged by France's leading winemakers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Michael Edwards' guide is neatly laid out in sections that briefly and without being overly technical explain the uniqueness of Champagne -- the region, the wine and the process by which it is made -- and a series of profiles of the major Champagne houses with comments on specific wines and insights into the various house styles. When this guide was first released a few years ago, it was a good replacement for Serena Sutcliffe's book "Champagne" that had recently gone out of print. Unfortunately, Edwards book is now out of date as well. This offering is deceptive since it is billed as the third edition and the flyleaf carries a 1999 copyright, but the text is almost entirely lifted from the earlier edition and most of Edwards' tasting notes are from 1993 and 1994. There have been substantial changes in the Champagne industry since the early 90s and some of these are ignored in Edwards' book. He writes clearly and has good tasting insights, but his notes won't be of much help to consumers just getting into Champagne and wondering about wines currently available, not those released five years ago. I give it five stars as a general reference, but only 1 star for topicality.

This little book is more than worth its minimal cost. As a general guide to the history of the great drink it's somewhat sketchy, but if you want the word on what Champagne to order and what not to (for the same price), it will provide just that. Follow its 9 or so top marques and you almost cannot go wrong. More than that though, it identifies some superb non-vintage Champagnes from less-well-publicised houses. Some I found in Epernay sell (unbelievably) for less than 90 francs (\$11) at the cave door -- half the price of the book. Though the 3 category ratings are relatively useful, a more finely discriminating set (say 5) would have been much better as a guide, particularly where the 2-star marques are concerned. Reading between the lines though you may be able to tell which 2-stars are better than others. As other reviewers have noted, it is now a bit dated: the '99 edition surprisingly fails to mention the '95 vintage at all. A well revised edition would be welcome.

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