

QRW

The Wine Magazine

Brut Strength

Here are six top non-vintage Champagnes for \$45 or less.

QRW TASTING STAFF



We love French Champagne and consume it unabashedly and liberally.

It has verve — a bearing, a majesty all its own. Not even the economic meltdown can deter us, because there is much good Champagne out there at prices that can satisfy even the biggest of Scrooges this holiday season. Always remember the words of Napoleon: “I deserve it in victory and need it in defeat”; hence, it can elevate us in the best and worst of times. The best prices can be found in what to us are the most desirable and interesting of Champagnes: the non-vintages, the “House” wines, the style upon which Champagne houses make their money. It is also the style upon which Champagnes must date because consumers expect consistency in their choice of Champagnes. The styles of Champagnes differ — some may be extra dry, some brut, some slightly sweeter — but consumers must either know or like the style because it’s what they’ll return to each time they buy bubbly. Champagne producers have long been savvy about this.

We prefer our non-vintage Champagne to be “Brut” (dry or nearly bone dry), and find that many of the newer styles seem to be getting away from Brut, preferring too much dosage or residual sweetness.



We also prefer our bubbly from one of the three major towns — Reims, Epernay, or Ay. We like a traditional blend of Pinot Noir and

Chardonnay (and some Meunier), but you can be sure that there are few Blanc de Blancs (all Chardonnay) to which we’ve said no. It must be lively, frothy, and foamy; it must be slightly chilled — never dumb or excessively cold; it must have small, on-going bubble activity because that’s exactly where the flavor in Champagne is. Bubbles are everything. It must also have ample body, some richness, with brioche (dough/bread/yeast) flavors, and especially some length. The good non-vintages can deliver most of these. We found several we liked at a blind tasting, and offer these as great value Champagnes for festive times.

For this column, we narrowed down the non-vintages from an initial 20 to 15. Of the 15, we dropped any one of them over \$45 retail — and as much as possible we wanted the price to be attached without some special sale; also consumers had to be able to buy the wine easily and nationally. We

decided this issue would be a “frugal” Champagne column. That left us with only eight Champagnes, none of which disappointed. From these we selected six. Here are what stood out, some of which were well below our cut-off price.



SIX NON-VINTAGE CHAMPAGNES FOR \$45 OR LESS

CO-BEST OF SHOW

- LAURENT-PERRIER NON-VINTAGE L-P BRUT, \$40.

Frothy and rich with pear, toasted nut and brioche flavors. Dry, tart, crisp and long on the finish.

CO-BEST OF SHOW

- POMMERY BLANC DE BLANCS NON-VINTAGE, \$45.

Nicely focused, with elegant pear and bread dough flavors. Delicious!

- DEUTZ BRUT CLASSIC NON-VINTAGE BRUT, \$40.

This bubbly improves annually. Floral nose leads to opulent yet stylish almond and bread dough flavors. Touch of sweetness on the long finish.

- PERRIER JOUËT NON-VINTAGE BRUT, \$40.

This bubbly always delivers. Lovely flavor of fig, pear, cream and almond. Long, crisp, elegant finish.

BEST BUY

- POL ROGER NON-VINTAGE BRUT, \$37.

Always on our gift-giving list. Perhaps the best value in non-vintage Champagne. Mouth-filling, frothy, elegant and fine.

- TAITTINGER LE FRANCAIS NON-VINTAGE BRUT, \$40.

Consistently reliable bubbly. Frothy, lively, dry, with brioche notes. Fairly long finish. ☺

38 Quarterly Review of Wines, Winter 2009/2010

WINTER 2009/10
\$4.95
QRW.COM

