

10 top affordable champagnes

Pol Roger Brut Réserve (\$35) Year in and year out, this medium-bodied, well-balanced wine from a leading small Champagne house is a perennial value and a particular favorite of mine.

Ayala Brut Majeur (\$40) Clean and bright, with good acidity—a sprightly aperitif from a long-established Champagne house that has made a big quality rebound in recent years.

Bollinger Special Cuvée (\$45) Bollinger's nonvintage—broad-flavored and toasty—is a true classic.

Marc Hébrart Cuvée de Réserve Brut (\$50) This grower, based in the Vallée de la Marne, may not be famous, but his elegant Pinot Noir—dominant wine deserves to be better known.

Charles Heidsieck Brut Réserve (\$55) The house style of the highly regarded Charles Heidsieck is readily apparent in this wine: complex yet approachable, full-bodied but lively.

Gosset Grande Réserve Brut (\$55) There's excellent weight and richness in this nonvintage from one of the oldest houses in Champagne; it's a great wine to pair with food.

Guy Larmandier Vertus Brut Premier Cru (\$55) A delicate wine from one of the top growers in the Côtes des Blancs region of Champagne.

Philipponnat Brut Royale Réserve (\$55) This nonvintage from a highly regarded small Champagne house is a “wow” of a wine and nearly as good as Philipponnat's famed tête de cuvée, Clos des Goisses.

Jean Milan Carte Blanche Brut (\$60) Generous and creamy—a masterpiece of a wine.

Alfred Gratien Brut Classique (\$70) A lovely, well-balanced, rather fruity blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier that's a pure pleasure to drink.